

# **Just Enough Words**

An Assortment of  
Laconic Stories & Essays

**George Francis Reid**

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Words and Music by ROGER McGUINN and CHRIS HILLMAN

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### **SONG FROM "M\*A\*S\*H" (SUICIDE IS PAINLESS)**

Words and Music by MIKE ALTMAN and JOHNNY MANDEL

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Please pardon the run-on disclaimer's verbosity.



Grateful Acknowledgement

To my life long mate:

Your editing skills rendered a better book - with my  
thanks and LOVE.





*Dedication*

*To Mom, it all began with you.*



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# PREFACE

## Just Enough Words

It was an astounding number. In so many ways, about so many subjects, have so many words been written - particularly prolix prose. According to his back of the envelope calculations, there were currently about 6.5 trillion words written in the nearly 130 million books that had been published. Admittedly that number of words was appreciably less than the number of stars in the universe and significantly less than the number of atoms in his body. Nevertheless, it was an astounding number.

Knowing that amount, he strived to write stories and essays, about a variety of subjects, with just enough words to both enlighten and entertain his readers - superfluous words were left to their imaginations. Like the Lone Ranger's silver bullets, every word counted. He also knew that the number of words he would add to that increasingly vast universe of published works would be vanishingly small; nevertheless they needed to be written, briefly, but not in a flash. And so he wrote - 69,413 words.

Eons after his death, when the number of words in books had exceeded the number of atoms in his body, literature written in laconic prose came into vogue and his assortment of stories and essays became a best seller. By necessity, brevity had finally become the soul of wit and people enjoyed how he had stitched the words together.

Ironically, too many words were then written by historians, literary critics and psychologists, all trying to explain the meaning and significance of his words. But as there was little in the archives about his past, other than that he had lived during the transient "Tweet" Era, their words were merely speculative.

In some regards it is fortunate that the author of the book with just enough words did not become popular during his lifetime. His writings were for neither fame nor fortune. But he did want his existence to amount to more than merely being another source of recycled atoms dispersed about the universe.

# Mom's Memory, Dad's Temper and Me

---

I made a vow during my eulogy to Mom. As I stood before family and friends, I vowed that, although she had lost her memory, as long as I had mine, she would be remembered. But there is much that I do not want to remember and time has not helped me forget.

I care not to remember the day her neurologist told me that Mom had Alzheimer's disease. Only in death is the diagnosis of this dreaded disease definitive, yet the doctor was definite. The diagnosis brought me fear of the days ahead.

As time quickly passed, Mom's ever increasing senility was accompanied by extreme changes in mood followed by confusion and tearful fear. Some nights I would sleep at my parent's home. The next morning Mom would crawl into my bed, cuddle alongside me and whisper "I'm so scared." For different reasons, we were both scared.

Dad, never one to cope with the slightest adversity or even changes to his routine, reacted to Mom's infirm state in his typically primal fashion - unmitigated rage.

Books and support groups eventually helped Dad to understand and to prepare for the ordeal that had been thrust upon them. But still he could not control his fury and Mom was his vulnerable target. Her simplest misdeeds would propel him into uncontrollable screams. Removing a dishtowel from its assigned hook would cause his nostrils to dilate, eyes to bulge and arms to flail. Moving a pillow from the couch to a chair would arouse volatile eruptions.

For as long as I can remember, the family euphemism for his connipations was "Dad's temper," and we learned to tolerate its many manifestations. After his stormy mood subsided, it was a certainty that he would never apologize. And, if his wrath was directed towards me, Mom would



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try to offer protection. But when Mom needed my protection the most, I stood by helplessly and tried to control my paternally inherited rage.

While her disease was in its infancy, I pleaded with Mom to let me help protect her from Dad's relentless fits. It was for naught. Her memory had taught her that it would only exacerbate her situation and, as she had always done in the past, she would cope.

With that said, she extracted a promise from me that, no matter the circumstances, I would not come to her defense. Tragically, she did not comprehend the nature of her disease and that she would become increasingly vulnerable to Dad's temper. Time would prove me right.

Soon after that promise, I was put to the first test. The morning of my sister's wedding began with the sounds of Dad shouting. My wife and I rushed into my parents' bedroom to witness Dad storming out and Mom huddled in the corner of the closet and uncontrollably crying. The reason for his ire? Mom could not arrange the groupings of guests for the photo sessions. My wife helped her with this simple task and to dress for the happy occasion. I stood by, angry and helpless.

Before the ceremony, many of my parents' closest friends took me aside to tell me about Dad's treatment of Mom. His terrifying tantrums knew no bounds and their attempts to protect her were useless. They pleaded with me to "do something about it." How could I explain to them about this son's promise to his defenseless mother? It was not a day for celebration. And the days to come were worse.

Sunday evenings, long distance telephonic conversations would bring the same appalling routine. I would listen to Dad yell at Mom and Mom cry. I desperately wanted to threaten or pummel him. Instead, with the close of each conversation, I vowed not to be a part of Dad's life after Mom lost hers. I did not want, or dared not, to be near him.

One of the quirks of the early stages of the disease is that it primarily affects short term memory, so there were some conduits to the happy moments of Mom's distant past. Frank Sinatra, both the man and his music, was a part of that past. Playing recordings of his songs would bring sheer joy to her face, but it would not endure.

One day, after spending time with his new lady friend, Dad had returned home to find Mom singing and dancing to the music of Frank. He

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sat down to watch and Mom plopped into his lap, sang in his ear and happily hugged and kissed him. At first Dad was merely uncomfortable with the situation, but as Mom's display of affection grew, so did his irritation, and he leaped out of the chair and room. It appeared that Dad's temper also denied Mom a modicum of affection and compassion.

With the advent of Dad's lady friend, he hired additional care givers and increasingly spent most days and many nights away from home and Mom. Finally, he decided that Mom would be "better off" as a resident at a "home" that specialized in the care of people with senile dementia.

Friends and relatives alike were aghast by these turns of events; I was pleased. A lady friend would keep Dad happy and less likely to burst into another rampage. Living apart from Dad would distance Mom from his wrath. It would reduce her torment to the internal. The more time he spent away from Mom, the better.

Her spacious room in the residence contained the furniture she most liked and the paintings she most cherished, those of her children when young. The nurses and attendants showed Mom kindness and attentiveness. The food was even palatable. Mom settled into her new environment quite nicely and her anxiety diminished.

Some short months later, over a span of two weeks, I received two phone calls I care not to remember. The first was from Dad. Mom was dead. I was stunned. The residence's physician had recently declared that, while she may not be of sound mind, she was of sound body - no complications. Now he indeterminately certified that her death was "natural due to complications of Alzheimer's dementia." Dad was satisfied. An autopsy was unneeded.

The funeral was brief; two eulogies from two sons and then Mom was laid to rest. After all others had departed from the cemetery, and the autumn leaves and rain descended upon me, I stood at the fresh grave site sobbing with sorrow and anger. That night Dad cried himself to sleep and I vowed not to return to the town of my youth.

Weeks later, the second phone call was from my sister, who just learned from the residence's head nurse that Dad had brought his temper to Mom's sanctuary. By all accounts, two nights before Mom's death, the unmistakable sound of Dad screaming followed by a loud pounding sound had

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come from Mom's room. Alarmed, the attendants rushed into the room to find Dad slamming Mom's shoulders, and consequently her head, into the wall. With their arrival, Dad stopped. Mom was stunned and staggering. The attendants politely but firmly ordered him to leave the building and the incident was duly reported. Dad's temper brought violence to Mom's sanctuary.

In disbelief (Dad's temper is capable of many things, but this?), I spoke with the head nurse. She confirmed the worst.

She also added that Dad's outbursts of anger had become a daily occurrence that both tormented Mom and upset the other residents. Consequently, and ironically, on the day of the funeral he had been scheduled to meet with the residence's head nurse and physician and was to be instructed to reduce the frequency of visits and to get his temper under control. It was too little, too late.

Was this the first time that Dad had been violent? Had it happened in the privacy of their home? Still, it will never happen again.

Using terms as subdural or epidural hematoma's, physicians will tell that such a blow to the head can cause the brain to swell and lead to death. Without an exhumation and autopsy, they cannot determine if Dad's behavior that night caused her death, but the sequence of events are more than coincidental and should make him a suspect.

I debated whether to contact a lawyer or the authorities, but from her grave Mom counseled me to do nothing. Let it rest, let me rest. Justice would not be served.

After the customary period, Dad married his lady friend and stripped the house he once shared with Mom of her memories. To escape the cold, he and his bride purchased an additional home in warmer climes. Together they thrived.

I once met with Dad. He denies having mistreated Mom and claims that he remembers nothing about that fateful evening at the residence except than he "lost it." It would have been futile to continue the conversation. Dad was having difficulty controlling his rage. With fists clenched, I was have difficulty controlling my inner Dad.

I doubt there are adequate words, in any language, to describe the unabated anguish and rage I endure knowing that Dad's hands may have

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cast Mom's fatal blow. The emotion makes for an irritable disposition by day and sleepless nights.

Strangely, there are some days when I wonder if I should start anew with Dad, my only remaining parent. Mom tells me under no circumstances. She also tells me to think only good thoughts. So, I remember her wit, her warm smile, her emotional "love and kisses" and, above all, her devotion to her family - especially her children.

The last words I heard Mom utter were, "I think I am losing my memory." Mom lost her memory, then her life. But so long as I have mine, I will remember the last words I heard Dad scream at Mom during the last night I spent at their home before she left for the place of her death - "I could just kill you."

Decades later, Dad and his lady friend continue to grow old together. They happily shuttle between their homes north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Regarding Mom, he claims no regrets, no remorse, no guilt.

Mom used to tell me that time heals all wounds - not this wound. Others say that time wounds all heels - not this heel. These words are neither of consolation nor cathartic.

So, through those same decades, as I stand before her grave, real or imagined, I continue to remember, with concealed anguish and rage, all. Who could forget? Who would forget??

As for Mom, she is no longer scared.

Dad is losing his memory.

# Joey and The Superhero

---

They were the closing days of Joey's lackluster career as a member of the employed; retirement was on the horizon. His departure would be as uneventful as was his time with this company. He expected some manner of farewell, instead he endured one more salvo of humiliation from his supervisor - which he accepted with seemingly good humor.

With his shoulders slouched more than usual, Joey returned to his cubicle and re-opened his computer. In short order, his mind began to drift to a not-too-distant time when, with a sudden stroke of genius, The Superhero, aka Joey's alter ego, invents a widget and founds a multi-trillion dollar global corporation. He becomes rich beyond belief.

The Superhero owns palatial homes, is surrounded by beautiful women and rubs elbows with the jet set. His opinion is sought by kings and presidents alike. There is even talk about him being courted as a presidential candidate - or king. Thanks to the press, his fame and fortune is known throughout the world. He is the envy of everyone he has ever known, particularly his most current almost-former supervisor.

... .-. .- -. -. -. . .-

After seven strenuous years, Joey finally graduated with a B.S. in Sociology. After another six months - in the interim working as a temporary trainee at the local pizza parlor - he eventually landed his first real job with potential, a career, a future, as a used car salesperson.

Unenthused with his occupation, Joey sat in his cubicle playing solitaire on the computer. In moments of utter boredom, his imagination would wander.

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The financial world was in a state of chaos. Companies were without financing and employees were being laid-off by the millions. Both the stock and bond markets were plunging - again.

An international summit of world leaders and their economists is convened to solve the crisis, but all they do is bicker. In the midst of this turmoil, The Superhero (B.A., M.F.A., J.D., CMBA, Ph.D, CPA) suddenly appears. He confidently strides up to the podium and with a wave of his hand simply and succinctly explains how the catastrophe can be easily solved. After a moment of murmurs, in unison, the entire audience leaps to their feet, applauds and cheers.

As he slowly walks up the auditorium aisle, his hands are shaken, his back slapped and his cheeks kissed. He leaves it to the experts to explain to the press the genius of his solution. Within a week, monies flow into company coffers, people are rehired and the markets skyrocket. Thanks to The Superhero, the world is a better place.

..- -. ... . . -.

Without much consideration, Joey attended the small college a short distance from his hometown, the latter seldom visited. For too many years, he could not decide on a major and instead elected to enroll in the easiest classes available. He was ignored by his roommate, dorm mates, classmates, and teachers. He satisfied his yearning for companionship and camaraderie by attending the college football games.

Sadly, the team has won no games all season - or during any season. The students, faculty, administration and even the vendors heckle them in disgust. In a stadium of boos, Joey cheers; he understands. He dreams of better games to come.

In that home game, which the team is decisively losing; Home - 0, Visitor - 64, The Superhero suddenly races onto the field. The crowd is puzzled. He enters the home team huddle, calls out some commands and takes control.

He runs with the ball, he passes the ball, he catches the ball, sometimes running, passing and catching in the same play. And, for good measure, he kicks the ball. The final score is Home - 102, Visitor - 64. The home team crowd goes wild. The boos become cheers. He is lionized.

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And there's more. The Superhero's team goes on to win their conference, division and the DC Bowl. He graduates (B.A., B.S.) class valedictorian and marries the voluptuous captain of the cheerleaders. They live happily ever after.

- .-. .- .-- .-- . -..

Although his high school classes were more interesting than what he had ever academically experienced, Joey was not up to the task and it was reflected in his grades. His athletic skills had also not improved, although he thought of joining the Comic Book Club.

It seemed that the halls of the school were overcrowded, but he travelled them unseen. Except at the end of one school day, when a group of bored bullies locked him in his locker. Banging and hollering was futile. His imagination calmed him down.

The kidnapped girl is the most beautiful, smart and popular female in school. She captains the cheerleading squad, looking great in that super short-skirted uniform. Her boyfriend is the captain of the football, basketball and baseball teams.

The Superhero peddles his bike at speeds faster than the kidnapper's racing getaway car. He rides alongside the car, reaches into the driver's window, grabs the abductor by the throat and forces him to bring the car to a halt. He pulls him out of the car. The bad guy takes a swing at The Superhero who blocks the punch with an Age-uke and renders the attacker senseless with a lightning fast Shutō-uchi. He unties the damsel in distress and uses the same rope to secure the kidnapper to a tree.

Since our champion is not old enough to have a driver's license, he lifts the coed onto his bicycle seat and, mounting behind her, he peddles back to school, where her parents, teachers and classmates cheer their arrival. The boyfriend sulks. After The Superhero lifts the girl off the bike, she asks "How can I thank you?" He magnanimously replies, "You just did." And pedals away into the sunset.

.- .-- .- - .... - .. -.-.

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In middle school, sex hormones and pent up energies were becoming prevalent within the student body. The loudest and most extroverted were the most popular. Joey was neither.

He was noticed by no one, not even his teachers, despite his poor grades. Barring attending classes, he participated in no school activities, academic, athletic or otherwise.

Hence, Joey was a loner. To add to his misery, the last school dance before winter break was approaching. It was the event of the year, but he was too shy to attend. As usual, he mended his wounds with his fertile imagination.

The dance is boring. The band, hired by the principal, plays music his parents would enjoy. And although many of the students, at their parents' insistence, had taken dance lessons, they are not going to humiliate themselves by struggling with the Waltz, Foxtrot, Tango, Cha Cha, Rumba or Mambo. Not even the Box Step.

Then suddenly The Superhero arrives. He grabs the guitar from one of the band members and starts singing and strumming, displaying dazzling musical virtuosity. He tells the crowd that the song is one of his own compositions and they go wild. They chant, they sway, they move to the groove of the music. The band begins to get the beat and plays along.

The Superhero returns the guitar and jumps into the crowd. His musical prowess is only exceeded by his genius on the dance floor. He makes athletic moves that leave everyone in awe. His dancing defies gravity. The Superhero leaps to the ceiling of the gymnasium and jumps over a line of 20, or more, students. He leads them in song and dance. The throng is in a frenzy, and then simultaneously collapse.

The Superhero leaves the gymnasium with the students in that state of stupor. This night's phenomenon will become legend for generations to come.

-- .. ... ..- . . -

Elementary school was a social shock for Joey. There were so many children and teachers whom he did not know. Between bantering, bickering, teasing and the occasional fighting, the pecking order was soon formed. Joey was at the bottom.



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It was difficult adjustment for Joey. After school he would rush home and oftentimes could be seen wearing a pair of underpants and socks outside his pants, a towel tied around his neck as a cape and goggles, so that he would not be recognized. Other times his fantasies would go beyond.

He has only one friend, Annette Funicello; he loved those ears attached to her cap, and more.

The Superhero hears her screaming for help and flies to her aid. Annette is confronted by an armed robber. Our hero swoops down and punches the bad guy in the chin, sending him flying into a wall and rendering him unconscious.

Annette swoons but then rapidly recovers and gives The Superhero her famous smile. Our boy hands the crook's gun to a nearby man, who had done nothing to rescue Annette. The man has a shocked look on his face as he stares at the gun and then The Superhero.

The Superhero then scoops up Annette in his arms and flies her back to the television studio, just in time for the next rehearsal. As he sets her down on the ground, she asks "Will I ever see you again?" He replies "I am always just a call away." And he flies away into the sky.

.-. . .- .-. -- --- ... -

Joey was the runt of the family. The last of seven children (his father wanted a son), he was ignored by his sisters, adored by his father and tormented by his mother. She blamed and berated him for everything. Or nearly everything; his father received his share of her scorn. His first memories were of his mother screaming at his father.

His only sanctuary from her constant onslaughts was his father's basement office. It was somewhere safe, somewhere to daydream about his mother being trapped in her burning automobile, the result of a self-inflicted veering off the road and into a gully. The police and fireman fear that they cannot free her before the car explodes.

Suddenly, in his first appearance, The Superhero arrives and with stupendous strength frees her from the car. Miraculously, he is able to treat her burns and, after gently lifting her into his arms, flies them home. She is so grateful that Joey, and his father, win her attentions and affections. She screams at them no more.

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... . -- .-- . . - . .- - . -..

It was a protracted, painful disease that was bringing Joey's life to an end. The opiates dulled his attempts to reminisce.

But they also helped him clearly see the future. A terrorist group plants a biobomb that contains a superbug designed to kill, painfully, millions of people. There are no antibiotics, no drugs, no treatments against this malicious microbe. The bomb is planted in the heart of Vastropolis and is set to explode if tampered with. The authorities, civilian and military alike, are inert. The city is in a state of panic.

Suddenly, moving at the speed of light, The Superhero scoops up the bomb and flies into deep space. A faint flash is seen, but never again The Superhero.

The world will mourn his death. There will be services, memorials, observances and marches in his memory. In death he will be lionized, idolized and worshiped. He will go down in history as a, if not, The Superhero.

# Hello Friend

---

There was a timid knock on my door and, after opening it, a meek mutter of the words “Hello friend.” I had never laid eyes on her before. She needed my help. The temperature in her apartment was sweltering, the thermostat was a perplexing contraption and her husband was away - again. So she had painfully climbed and crawled up the stairs to my recently inhabited apartment to ask that I come to her aid.

Their apartment was sultry; she was not. She appeared old, thin, with hastily applied lipstick and lackluster eyes. But she had once been beautiful. The apartment was abused and crowded with furniture. And, despite the frigid winter weather, all the windows were open - it was the only way she how knew to cool the place. I lowered the setting on the thermostat from its 85 degrees Fahrenheit to something more comfortable and instructed her how to do the same. This would become a ritual.

It was during that bitter winter that I came to realize that it was the summer-like temperatures in their apartment that enabled them to attire themselves in a light housedress for her and shorts and a Hawaiian shirt for him. They were a sight of sartorial splendor.

As they lived directly below, with only a thin and poorly insulated floor as a barrier, their furnace heat found its way to my living quarters. My monthly heating cost less than a delivered pizza - with extra cheese.

Unfortunately the thin floor could not insulate my hearing her continuous complaints and their constant arguments. She complained about the constant pain in her hip. Her husband told me that a countless number of doctors and tests could not find any problems. Her medical expenses could bankrupt their insurance carrier.

At least once a month the ambulance would arrive and she would spend a few days in the local hospital. I am certain that because of her

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frequent admissions, she was on a first-name basis with all the employees - despite the high turnover rate at that questionable institution.

The routine was always the same. First, she chose a time when her husband was away. Her fingers pressing 911 on the telephone keypad would bring the shrill sound of the approaching ambulance. Next, came the crowd, even though the event was a common occurrence. She was pleased with the attention. Lastly, there was the shrill sound of the departing ambulance. Her husband would eventually return to find his wife missing - again - and he would enjoy a good meal followed by a peaceful night's rest.

The last ambulance siren called for him. It was seemingly just another night that began with her usual yelling and ended with the all-too-familiar screechy sound of the ambulance. But to my shock, the next morning I learned that he, not she, was in the hospital. He had suffered a stroke, was in a coma and not expected to live. He didn't, and now rests in everlasting peace.

Days after he died, she and her belongings were emptied from the apartment by her son and his noticeably displeased wife. She was to live with them. With their departure, the apartment was thoroughly cleaned, new carpet laid, the walls freshly painted and the new tenant settled. She knew how to operate the thermostat.

# Bert - The Computerphilic Cat

---

Once upon a time, instead of slogging away at my computer, I found myself watching cyberspace videos of animated birds. It was my own fault.

This strange change in my work habit started when our cat, Bert (who is the sort of character that yowls to be let indoors to use the litter box) took to sleeping on the arm rest of the chair at which I work. Either out of curiosity or pity for Bert's boring existence, I decided to search the internet for videos enjoyed by cats.

The first video, of a squirrel eating nuts, hardly roused Bert from his slumber. The second, showing an array of colorful cartoon objects, opened his eyes. The third, displaying birds of the jungle, brought him to full attention.

But it was during the last recording, presenting a full ensemble of multiple species of birds and a lone squirrel, all vying for space around a feeder, that he assumed the predator's pose and attacked the screen. This virtuality was the feline version of a video game.

My work habits changed with his discovery that my computer could be a source of entertainment. My daily routine got underway with me sitting in my plush chair, booting up the computer and no sooner did the computer announce the appearance of my home page, than Bert was by my side.

I prefer to start my routine by reviewing my e-mail messages and the current news, but Bert had different priorities. He insisted that the show must go on. At first he would tap my proximate hand with his dominant paw. If the video did not appear, then he would press that same paw against that same hand. If the video still did not appear, he would drape his entire body across that hand.

When the video did materialize, Bert's pupils would dilate, then would come the purr, followed by his head rotating counter-clockwise, the

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chattering (tempo allegro) and then, five minutes and twenty-eight seconds later, when the blue jay re-appeared .... he would lose interest and go to sleep on the keyboard. I was both amused and exasperated.

A day did not go by when Bert did not demand his ever-escalating time on the computer. My work productivity plummeted. I needed to out-fox the cat.

In desperation, I converted the spare bedroom into Bert's playroom. It now houses a large comfortable cat pad, every toy from the local pet store and as the centerpiece a 52- inch, 3D television set - with surround sound - all wired to a computer which continuously plays his favorite videos.

I miss Bert sitting by my side, but I don't miss his videos.

### Epilogue

Two months later, Bert is bored with all the videos. Is anyone interested in purchasing a 52- inch, 3D television set - with surround sound - and computer?

# Dead End

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In 70 C.E., heir to the Roman throne, Titus Flavius Caesar Vespasianus Augustus and his four legions destroyed Jerusalem's Second Temple. All that remains is a wall - the Western Wall, or Kotel.

On this sunny Friday afternoon, in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, multitudes of male worshipers, wearing obligatory head coverings (some sporting fur hats the size of large cylindrical hat boxes) and rhythmically bowing deep in prayer and male tourists (wearing cardboard kippahs) and not praying are facing that Wall. Also facing the Wall, but cordoned off in a separate section, are modestly dressed females (worshipers and tourists alike).

Behind them are proselytizing orthodox Jews. Beyond them are more tourists and men and women in uniform. In preparation for an official ceremony, those in the ranks of the Israeli Defense Force are unpacking books, stacking automatic weapons and setting up chairs. Members of the Israeli Police Force, with vans filled with equipment, weapons, ladders (to scale walls) and ambulances, are on guard.

Cameras, in phones or not, are omnipresent. Tourists take photos of the sights and of themselves in front of those sights. Soldiers take photos of each other. Tourists take photos of soldiers and of soldiers with tourists.

Above the wall is the Haram al-Sharif, or Har Ha-Bayit, or Temple Mount. Its grounds are not as crowded as below - except in the Al-Aqsa Mosque where worshipers are also at prayer. After the service, some of the congregants head home. Others, including Abdullah, filled with the anger and resentment of the ages, run to a nearby grove of trees and, yelling "Allahu Akbar," hurl stones and more over the Al-Riwak Al Gharbi Portico and into the crowd below at the wall. It is not an unusual occurrence.

The reaction below is also not unusual. Worshipers and tourists flee from the wall. The Israeli Police spring into action. Proudly wearing her

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triple chevron, Yehudit is one of the first of the police to hurriedly climb up the wooden stairway and dash through the gateway at the Bab al-Magharbeh into the Haram al-Sharif and upheaval.

With helicopters hovering above, police stun grenades are intended to scatter the mob. Instead, the mob redirects its stones and more at the police - except Abdullah. Proudly wearing a black-and-white fishnet patterned keffiyeh that masks his face, the oversized 13-year-old tenaciously and zealously continues to throw things over the wall. Between the flashes from the grenades, Yehudit spots Abdullah and races after him. Abdullah sees Yehudit and runs. Yehudit gives chase.

Hoping to elude Yehudit, Abdullah rushes through the Bab al-Qattanin and past the distracted Israeli Police guards at the entrance to the crowded Suq Al-Qattanin marketplace. Leaving the suq, he thought he might have lost Yehudit, but soon their eyes meet.

Thinking to escape through the Bab al-'Amud and into the expanse of East Jerusalem, Abdullah takes a right turn onto El-Wad Street. But along the way, fearing that Yehudit may radio his description to the guards posted ahead at Ala' e-Din Street, he sheds his keffiyeh and coat and, merging with the crowds, inconspicuously walks past their scrutinizing glares. Out of their eyesight and becoming exhausted, he tries to hide in one of the shops, but the merchant yells at him to leave.

Having twice evaded the police and not wishing to press his good fortune, Abdullah decides not to attempt passing through the heavily guarded Bab al-'Amud. Instead, he weaves through the throngs of natives and tourists and makes a left turn at Via Dolorosa and toward a gateway without guards - the Bāb ij-Jdīd.

Now within eyesight of Abdullah, Yehudit radios her position and a description of him - sans keffiyeh and coat. And, although equally exhausted (all the gear that she is carrying is starting to take its toll), she continues the chase.

For both of them, the steps are steep and they must forcefully thread their way through the groups of worshippers following the Stations of the Cross - particularly those stopping to kneel and pray where Jesus had once stopped. Once again, they lock eyes.



## Just Enough Words

The Via Dolorosa becomes the Aqaba El Khanqa Ascent. With legs throbbing and gasping for breath, Abdullah hopes that the steep and slippery steps of the Ascent will put some distance between him and Yehudit. He dashes up the steps and into the Christian Quarter, where the Ascent becomes St. Francis Street.

Still steep, but now less slippery, the steps take him to a T-junction where Abdullah makes a right turn onto Freres Road. Seconds later, Yehudit does the same.

Regrettably, in his haste to lose Yehudit, Abdullah neglects to read the street sign and mistakenly takes a quick right into St. Basil Alley. This time he stops at an L-junction located in front of the street's namesake monastery. With an impenetrable wall to his right, he turns left - into a dead end. Yehudit does the same.

Yehudit stops to catch her breath and report her location. She removes her baton and in Hebrew orders Abdullah to lie face down. Pacing back and forth, Abdullah replies in Arabic that he does not understand her and why is she chasing him. They both conclude that further verbal communication is pointless.

Yehudit starts to slowly approach Abdullah. He circles the dead end looking for an escape route. He pounds on a nearby door and barred windows and asks for refuge. He is refused. He is trapped.

Near the entrance to the dead end, a crowd of men, women and children appear. They cheer at Abdullah and jeer at Yehudit. Step-for-step, as she approaches Abdullah, the crowd is not far behind.

Yehudit calmly waves her baton and continues to approach. Abdullah fears she will beat him and slowly removes a grenade from his pocket and waves it at her. She reports the situation and requests urgent help. The crowd retreats a safe distance. Not Yehudit.

At first she wonders if it is a spent flash grenade that he retrieved from the riot but concludes that it is the wrong shape. She realizes that the person she is confronting is just a boy, slightly older than her own son - but this one has a lethal explosive.

Yehudit knows his rock throwing is a comparatively minor misdeed, but she cannot just let him escape; he may be a future terrorist. Abdullah concludes he cannot surrender, not with this crowd watching.

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Abdullah takes a long, deep breath, peers into the sky, starts praying, pulls the pin from the grenade and slowly walks towards Yehudit. She draws out her service revolver, releases the safety and aims at the youngster. He determinedly continues stepping towards her. She cocks her gun. While moving further back, the crowd chants, at an increasingly fevered pitch, "Allahu Akbar."

Everyone hears sirens rapidly approaching. The crowd vanishes. Abdullah and Yehudit lock eyes.

# The Siren

---

Dr. B is sitting at his office desk. I am sitting across from him. His clock indicates that the time is 3 P.M. and the calendar shows that it is June 5, 1934. In his friendly manner, he continues to call me his “hebephrenic youth.” Does he think that I am a Hebe?

What I am is a 23-year-old male. The clinical history report on Dr. B’s desk states that I am the only son amongst four children. They think that I am of average intelligence; I know better.

The report also states that I have a high school diploma. Expected to follow in my father’s footsteps, I had attended pharmacy school for one and a half years and then dropped out. I have been offered menial work, but declined. I am unsociable (rarely leaving my parents’ house, except to go to movies), uninterested in female companionship, disheveled and prefer to stay in bed until late in the day. My only passion is jazz.

The report also indicates that I am in the Cook County Psychopathic Hospital and have been diagnosed with dementia praecox. Apparently, I thought someone was trying to poison me - that’s what the voices in my head told me. It continues to divulge that my grandmother also behaved like me. Dr. B says I suffer from a disease with Mendelian characteristics.

The report does not indicate how long I will be a guest at this institution.

As the days go by, Dr. B and I spend much time together. He will ask me a question; I will answer with a grin or laugh. Other times I will slowly open and close my eyes, sniff, or take a deep swallow. I am not a conversationalist. But I do find him interesting.

When not with Dr. B, little interests me but food. Sometimes I can be violent. I even tried to choke some of the attendants. I tolerate visits from my family. The rest of the time I prefer to be in my own little world. And hum.

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Then my world changed, again. After many sessions with Dr. B, some hydrotherapy and the occasional Amytal, Dr. B's discharge papers report that I am sane, should seek regular psychiatric counseling and should be sterilized - for the sake of any future children.

Days later, I am dawdling down the streets of south side Chicago supposedly in search of a job. What a dreadful way to spend the day.

Suddenly the voices in my head are back. They are frantically and incessantly telling me to kill or be killed. I know that covering my ears is futile. I want to scream.

Then, from far away, I hear the low-pitched and muted sound of a siren. I wonder who is in trouble. Is it from a firetruck, police car or an ambulance? It must be coming closer; the sound is louder and the frequency higher. It continues increasing to a high-pitched crescendo. It's so loud and shrill that it is giving me palpitations and, despite the day's insufferable heat, my sweat is cold. It seems right next to me. I can't stand the noise. It is unbearable. I am in a panic. I need to scream!

Then, very slowly, the noise from the siren begins to diminish. Mercifully, the sound gradually becomes more muted, the pitch lower. It is quite soothing. I begin to breathe normally. Finally, the siren is silent. As are the voices in my head.

# The Door

---

“Let me out, let me out,” yelled the wheelchair-bound resident. His incessant yelling irritated everyone in the Special Care Dementia Unit, particularly the other resident who really did want to be let out - but The Door barred Victor’s way.

The Unit measured a cramped 2,000 square feet. Within its walls were ten bedrooms. Each room’s entry, closet doors and dresser drawers were labelled with a resident’s name. There were also a lounge, kitchenette and dining area. The walls were covered with fifty-year-old photos of the nearby towns. The conditions were Spartan - but secure.

The physical and mental status of the residents varied. The few who were generally lucid spent most of their days pacing the halls or, weather permitting, the path around the walled garden. The others, confined to a wheel chair or bed and usually wrapped in diapers, slept or stared at the television. Life in the Unit was limiting and confining.

For many moments of the day Victor would try to push open that Door which led to the main part of the “Manor.” He knew it could open because he watched those in the know pass through its threshold by mysteriously pressing some keypad buttons and then The Door. But the precise process was beyond his comprehension.

Then one fateful day, Victor pushed some buttons (akin to the proverbial typing monkeys) and then The Door and entered the forbidden zone. He was gratifyingly and happily free!

To Victor, traversing that once impenetrable portal was like entering a new world. Although he had once been a resident of this outside wing, it was as if he had never seen it before.

Victor wandered the main artery of the building. He peered into the bedrooms and paused by the large lounge to discover a room full of strangers. Some of the people were conversing; others watched the ever present

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television or playing organized games on a board or with cards. Many were asleep.

Continuing along the same hall, Victor moseyed by the administrative offices, the kitchen, dining room and finally the double door that led to the adjacent hospital. There he encountered another locked door and a dead end.

He tried to reverse his route and became bewilderingly lost. Step after step, turn after turn led him no closer to anything that looked familiar. He became frighten, then panicked. Suddenly he heard a familiar name. "Victor, what are you doing out here? Are you lost? Let me take you back."

Upon his safe return to the Unit, he was scolded by the attending nurse for his great escape. She told him that "perhaps he had learned his lesson from this incident." Victor mumbled, "Perhaps."

Thirty-two minutes later, the nurse found Victor pushing The Door and chastised him. "Victor, why are you pushing the door again? Don't you remember what happened to you?"

## Epilogue

One day the scribbler of this story, who frequently visits "Victor," was trying to exit that same Door. His egress was blocked by another visitor who was holding The Door ajar while conversing with one of the nurses. He politely excused himself and asked if he could pass. For a very long moment, his departure continued to be blocked until the nurse confirmed that he was a visitor and not a resident. Perhaps some day he will be a resident and The Door will become impassable.

# Amos and Me

---

Mornings in my laboratory inevitably started with me re-discovering his ubiquitous mouse droppings. The lab was of modest size and the vermin managed to deposit its feces throughout the floor, bench, desk and, mysteriously, between the pages of my books and journals.

I would repeatedly humanely trap the beast and put it outdoors, only to find more tiny turds the next morning. Finally I put the critter in a cage, fed it - necessitating the oft cleaning of his confines - and named it Amos. As I work alone, I found myself talking to him, never expecting a response.

Then one night, while I was engrossed in a critical experiment, I heard a squeaky voice. "Why don't you try culturing the cells with less oxygen?" I chose to ignore the voice and the suggestion, only to hear, "Hey stupid, I asked you a question. The cells will keep dying unless you lower the oxygen concentration." His suggestion made sense. And that was the beginning of my relationship with Amos.

As time moved along that relationship evolved into a collaboration to find a drug to cure a dreaded disease, and admittedly a most unusual inter-species bond. We discussed how to improve the experiments, what chemicals to test. We also talked about the worlds of science, the arts, politics, economics and much more.

Amos also persuaded me that if I freed him from the cage, he would not use the lab as a little boy's room. Sometimes while we worked he would perch himself on my shoulder. Often, the nocturnal *Mus musculus* would sleep in one of my lab coat pockets. When I was away, which was not often, he had the run of the lab.

Then one day, our labors bore fruit. We had discovered an experimental drug that could potentially save the lives of millions of people. To prove it, the drug would have to be tested in humans. But first, it would have to be tested in animals - a time consuming and expensive process. Being short of

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time and money, making Amos the first guinea pig seemed to be the handy choice. He disagreed.

Amos: Do I look like a guinea pig?

Me: No you are a mouse and the only one that I have right now for testing.

Amos: Tests that generally prove nothing because we animals are not “clinically relevant.” So, why should I take the risk?

Me: True, the results in animals are often not reproduced in humans. As my mentor once told me, “The mouse can lie.” Its an odds game. Nevertheless, given the situation and stakes, there are no alternatives. You don’t have a choice.

Amos: You think this is a game? And, why don’t I have a choice? Just because you caught me does not mean you own me. Do you think humans should be the only ones with rights?

Me: I don’t know. What I do know is that this drug may save countless lives.

Amos: You mean human lives. You realize that, unless this a miraculous drug, I will suffer and die in the process! Doesn’t my life count? Why is my life less important than a human’s?

Me: It grieves me to do this, but testing is required and you are just a mouse and the only one I have.

Amos: Just a mouse! We mice may not be clinically relevant, but 99% of our genes are similar to just you humans. Actually, I have a better idea. Test the drug on yourself. Carrion, Forssmann, Harrington, Altounyan, the Shulgin’s, and Marshall all practiced medical self-experimentation. Why not you?

Me: Alright, you persuaded me. I will spend the time and money to buy another mouse.



## Just Enough Words

Amos: Why should that mouse be the victim? Because it is a stranger? Because it was raised solely for experimentation?

Me: This is ridiculous. You choose. It's either you or another mouse.

Amos: I have decided that it should be either you or another human.

Me: You want me to decide between possible suicide and murder?

Amos: That's what you are asking of me.

Me: Look, this situation is no different than if you were killed for food. It's survival of the fittest.

Amos: So, this is your version of might makes right? Incidentally, mice are vegetarians.

Me: Yes, well, people have eaten mice since before written time - some still do. And more recently, we have also used them for experiments. That's life.

Amos: You mean my life.

Me: I am exhausted. We will finish this discussion in the morning.

With my cognitive dissonance stretched to its limits, I put Amos into his cage, secured the lid and turned off the lights.

# The Glowing Gobi Fish Farm Comes to Town

---

The fish glowed and consequently so did the town. The town is a bedroom (bathroom, kitchen and den) community situated alongside a “beautiful” harbor. And it was in this harbor that the fish glowed.

The Glowing Gobi Fish Company’s genetic engineers had inserted the luciferase gene from the firefly into Gobi fish, causing them to bio-luminesce green, yellow or red. Around the globe consumers hankered for these effulgent fish. Supply could not meet demand and new sites to farm the fish were imperative. Money was to be made both for the company and the town before the fad lost its glow. And so the Glowing Gobi Fish Farm came to the waters of the town.

But, the pisciculture was not welcomed by everyone. The naysayers feared the fish would pollute their pristine waters. They would attract objectionable and frighten desirable marine creatures. The fish pens would be unsightly and would drive down property values. Worst of all, they could only imagine - or not - what horrible things these “Frankenfish” might unleash on the town, or the world.

The use, or abuse, of the harbor became a divisive subject in the town. There were endless letters to the editor, for and against, of the local newspaper. Marches, for and against, were held. Experts came to pontificate, for or against, the subject. Oftentimes, what started as arguments, ended as fights.

Despite the protests, the governments would not let progress be thwarted. Carrying enormous cylindrical silver tanks, trucks by land and boats by sea converged at the town’s pier. Large hoses were linked between the tanks and tens of thousands of fingerlings were conveyed from the trucks to the boats and from the boats into the netted, acre-sized pens floating in the harbor.

## Just Enough Words

With each sunset, the townspeople would congregate along the harborside to watch the faint glows rise from the Gobis' pens. Hue's of green, yellow, red, brown and orange would dot the water to delight the onlookers. It was a sight to be seen.

The phenomena became a popular international tourist attraction. From boats and helicopters sightseers cruised around the pens. Plastic inflatable Gobi fish hats adorned children and there was talk of the company building a Glowing Gobi Fish museum and amusement park. The town was finally on the map.

Then, over a course of a week or so, the crowds began to notice that the glows began to dim. A government veterinarian found the fish to have bulging eyes, bloated bellies and open sores and, after some laboratory tests, declared the Gobis infected with Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia. They were bleeding to death.

Although the virus is known to lurk in this part of the world, it was not known to be around this town's environs. The local tabloid, not to be confused with the newspaper,

published a letter to the editor written by one of the town's councilors who reasoned that some nefarious saboteur(s) had infected the fish. He also recommended that to prevent any future sabotage, motion detectors be installed around the pens, which when activated would blare a recording of a dog barking. This is the same person who has a transparent "Welcome" sign affixed to the inside of his front door window. I suppose he welcomes people to leave, rather than enter, his home.

The proprietor and publisher of the tabloid, who has a statue of William Randolph Hearst on his front lawn, called for a multi-level governmental investigation. He also obliquely pointed an accusatory finger at the fish farm naysayers, referring to them as "moralistic Luddites." The mayor, from the look-out tower perched on top of his house, kept a vigilant watch for any nefarious activity.

Other citizens' reactions to these "Luddites" were more virulent. They shunned and scorned these vulnerable souls. Another town councilor, this one chronically inebriated, tried to start a fight with one of the more vocal naysayers. No one intervened and the humiliated quarry meekly crept away.

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Finally, common sense prevailed. The governments' investigators concluded that, as the virus cannot readily be acquired by the public and is known to lurk in neighboring areas, that this outbreak was due to an act of nature and not sabotage. They also ordered the remaining fish be destroyed and the area quarantined for a year.

The company decided it was in their economic interest to relocate to a virus-free area - time is money. Under a funereal atmosphere, the trucks and boats returned to the pier. This time they reversed their previous conveyance and removed tens of thousands of dead adult Gobis. The netted pens were taken away and the onlookers left.

The glow is gone.

# I Have a Chemical Dependency

---

My nights are sleepless. Four or five hours of fitful slumber is invigorating. I awaken eager, exhilarated, restless and ready to conquer my goals, be they short term, long term, realistic or not. My jaw is clenched and my body tense. It is how I start my day.

My days are as active as my nights. I maintain a frenetic pace, always multitasking, invariably taking notes - by pen, keyboard or voice recorder. My mind, along with the rest of my body, is constantly in motion. I've got to keep moving or lose my mind.

I am neither anxious nor do I have anxiety. I am mildly manic without the depression, the high without the low. I am all wound up. Perhaps those in the know would diagnose me as having a hyperthymic temperament, who knows? Then again, like most people, I am a different person to different people.

So, my temperament may be quasi-hyperthymic - why? I know of no member of my family, immediate or extended, who behaves like me. Some neuroscientists may say that various anatomical locations in my brain, with such mind-numbing names like cerebral cortex, thalamus, ventral brainstem, hippocampus and, my favorite, amygdala are involved. And chemicals with such polysyllabic names as 3-methoxy-4-hydroxyphenylglycol, 5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid or 5-hydroxytryptamine may participate. It seems that my cholinergic tone may be off and/or my noradrenergic and dopaminergic systems may be out of whack - fine by me.

Regardless of their names or functions, I crave these chemicals. My body expects its daily dose. I cannot imagine a life without them. I need not ingest, inhale or inject these chemicals. They are produced endogenously. How much more "natural" can you get?

The chemicals I depend upon do not leave me depressed, euphoric, anxious, irritable, aggressive, obsessive or paranoid. They do not cause

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me to hallucinate or have any spiritual or supernatural experiences nor alter my sense of time or state. They certainly do not leave me transcendently relaxed.

Meditation and medication have been suggested to “treat” my temperament, I think not. My chemicals may make me tired, impatient and occasionally crotchety, but I have palpitations when considering an alternative lifestyle. I prefer my personality traits; they have served me well.

Does my body depend on the chemicals for its survival? Some scientists claim that, to paraphrase, rather than living a life of leisure that lacks ambition, it is better for our overall health and life expectancy if we engage in difficult and demanding work that involves long hours and has the goal of achieving prominent distinction. Phew. Perhaps my dependency is a survival adaptation. If so, it is an exhausting way to survive.

Regardless of my diagnosis, my symptoms define me. Regardless of which chemicals I depend upon, they are who I am.

# Marty Versus Bull

---

Marty had an epileptic seizure the first day he ever attended school. His teacher stood by helplessly. She had majored in education, not medicine. His classmates surrounded his supine, shaking body with a mixture of shock and curiosity. Marty was a sight to behold.

The seizure slowly subsided; Marty regained his composure and returned to his assigned desk. Although he also had not attended medical school, from personal experience, he was familiar with the process. But school was never the same for him; he was now its freak.

Marty also came to the attention of his classmate, Bull. Bull was different from the rest of the herd. He never knew his father. His mother had named him Joshua, but to all others he was Bull - or else. His taurine appearance made the moniker apt. Even at birth his body was dense, including a thick neck, and those in attendance swear that his forehead had two protuberances that looked like horns. It would explain why he was always seen wearing a hat pulled down to his eyebrows.

The nickname also fit his personality. Bull moved slowly, unless he was ready to attack. He could and would, wreck any china shop. Nonbelligerents moved aside in his presence for Bull loved to fight and dedicated his days to pummeling his prey. His hero was the movie character Liberty Valance.

Unlike Bull, and much to the concern of his mother, Marty was thin and frail. With his moon-shaped head and monkey-like ears, he bore a close resemblance to the magazine character Alfred E. Newman. To add to his woes, his doctors could not control the seizures.

Everyone expected Marty to become Bull's pet prey. Bull thought otherwise. Perhaps he thought Marty was not enough of a challenge. After all, nearly everyone else in the class, including some of the girls, had clobbered Marty at every opportunity. Instead, if bored and feeling the urge to fight, Bull would defend him by vanquishing Marty's predator of the day.

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Except when Bull came to Marty's defense, the two never interacted. Through most of grade school they were classmates, but each sat in his separate back corner of the classroom. Both were social outcasts, Bull because he was feared and Marty because he was a freak.

Entry into middle school and pubescence brought changes to both boys. With a student body three times greater than grade school, Bull had peers and competition. Marty had more people to fear.

Hormones uncontrollably aroused their interest in girls, but their courting habits were clumsy. Marty, pimple-faced, would sweat and stammer and was prone to seizures when excited. Bull took a more socio-pathic approach.

He was suspended from school more days than not. He found more occasions to fight - mercilessly. He desperately tried to find a role model to emulate who would give him the persona to woo the girls. Liberty Valance would not fit the bill.

One evening, Bull strutted into the local ice cream parlor attired in a nearly all-black ensemble of leather coat, pants, boots, sunglasses and a fedora worn just above his eyes. The only color to his outfit was a purple shirt and yellow tie. He was a sight to behold. His schoolmates reacted to his appearance with a mixture of foreboding and ridicule. Bull felt self-conscious. He was not in his element.

He strutted up to the counter to order a beverage, but the words failed him. The silence grew louder. As he fled the room, he knocked down the only person who accidentally stood in his way, Marty.

Roaming the streets that night in a rage, destroying what he could in his path, Bull got it into his bovine brain that Marty was the reason for the night's fiasco. He felt hurt and humiliation and Marty should feel the same.

The next afternoon, with the ring of the bell, the student body made their usual exodus from the school via the back of the civic center. Lurking at a corner of the building, Bull appeared, blocked Marty's path and threw down the gauntlet. With a resounding voice for all to hear, he told Marty that he was pissed-off with Marty for shaming him and that he was going to teach him a lesson. A crowd quickly gathered around.

Before Marty could reply or react, he was face down on the pavement and Bull was slamming his head into the same. Unlike most school fights,



## Just Enough Words

this time the crowd was silent. This was a massacre and there was a profusion of blood.

Mercifully, an adult emerged from the building and pulled Bull off Marty. But the damage was done. Marty had been pitifully beaten and was so shaken that his rescuer could not tell if he was having a seizure.

The end of that year was the last time that Marty would hear the school bell ring. He drowned at summer camp. The talk was that he had a seizure. Some speculated he had committed suicide. His mother appeared the first day of school to thank everyone for being so kind to Marty. Teachers and classmates tearfully told her how much he would be missed.

Although he really never attended, Bull left school as soon as it was legally permissible. He left town after his mother acquiesced. For a decade his whereabouts were unknown and then he became national news. Bull had become a mule for a drug syndicate and died in agony, in a plane, at 35,000 feet, when the heroin-filled condom in his bloated belly burst. His mother had no one to thank for their kindness.

# HE'S BACK!

---

“He’s back!” they cheered. The hundreds of thousands of people gathered for the event wept with tears of rapturous joy. The Church of the Honest-to-God Believers had prophesied his return and, on the appointed day, time and location, he did.

The immediate reaction of the crowd of believers, doubters and reporters was that this short, pudgy, dark-eyed, dark-complected, curly-haired man did not look like him. But also in that crowd were multitudes of people in desperate need of a miracle. And, with the touch of his hands, those plagued with any number of debilitating and life-threatening diseases were suddenly and definitively cured. There was no doubt. Jesus Christ was back.

Despite eschewing the press, he became an overnight media star. The arrival of an alien from another planet would not have received this much attention. More crowds, more cheers and more tears, followed as he toured the world populated with Christians.

This moral Jew was amazed that a new religion, with billions of adherents, had been created in his name, but he was appalled by how that religion was being practiced. And, the more he toured, the more sickened he became by what he witnessed.

He was nauseated by the opulence of the Vatican and megachurches. The rivalries and conflicts between the various denominations and sects were beyond belief. He was revolted by the religious leaders’ ornate ceremonial costumes, mansions, limousines, and jets - this is not the life they should lead.

He was disgusted by many of the church services, particularly the contrived “miracles” performed and the sanctimonious self-serving sermons. To be sure, at the grassroots, many congregants demonstrated Christian charity. But those at the top appeared not to practice what they preached.

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He could not comprehend the churches' need for proselytizing (especially using billboards, some near others from lawyers soliciting clients), harboring pedophiles or the practice of self-flagellation. He considered the existence of apostles, prophets, saints, demons, purgatory and hell an article of faith - not fact. He could not imagine telling anyone to "go to hell" or "the devil with you."

Wherever he toured, there were lines, stretching for miles, of those in need of a miracle. One person at the head of one such line, he must have been waiting for days, was a pastor cum entrepreneur who wanted Jesus to participate in launching a "making miracles" franchise business - reasoning that it would help support the churches. For the very first time, Jesus was speechless.

While touring, he also read about the history of Christianity. He now understood that the intra-denominational rivalries he had been witnessing were steeped in that history. He was mortified to learn about all the death and destruction - and much more - perpetrated since his death in his name or in the name of his Father.

To his dismay, he also read one of the several translations of the Bible's New Testament and what had been quoted in his name. Often he would mutter to himself "I never said that" or "That is not what I meant." It was upsetting to read its stories and the laws that were commanded.

He was amused by the various paintings of himself, mumbling "I never looked like that." He considered the statues, statuettes - particularly the lit plastic variety - as idol worship and it was not how he wanted to be remembered.

He was flabbergasted by how his birthday was celebrated. It seemed like a mercantile contrivance. Who is Santa Claus? What are reindeer? Why does one of them have a red nose that glows? And, how do they fly? Why kill a tree for two weeks of decorations and presents, only to discard it the trash? Lastly, why had his fellow Jews built a "separation barrier" around the city of his birth?

He also read about some of the other religions of the world. It surprised him that Christianity had the most adherents. He was particularly intrigued by Islam because of its Hebraic heritage and that it had been born long after he had died, although he could not understand why the Jews and

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the Muslims were now enemies. He thought he would have enjoyed conversing with Siddhartha Gautama (aka Buddha).

One aspect the Bible did accurately relate was Jesus' compassion and championing of the poor and downtrodden. And so it was his revelations about this modern world that inspired him to preach about equality and justice. All the more, he even audaciously pleaded to the crowds, as he once had told that rich young man, to sell all of their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. He fervently told them that this one deed would start the world onto the right path.

Sadly, with few exceptions, his words were met with booing, obscenities and protests that this was blasphemy. Those words, needed by the impoverished, went unheeded by the affluent. The number of people in the crowds began to rapidly dwindle. Only a few of those desperate for a miracle remained

Jesus had thrown down the gauntlet and his words brought concern to the prosperous and powerful, unsettling people to the point of fright. They would tell themselves and others that Christ had become outdated, an anachronism, a man from another time - irrelevant. For further reassurance, they were convinced that his preaching was disruptive to the Christian world's religious order. Who would want to belong to a church that advocates giving away all one's wealth to others?

They concluded that Jesus needed to be taken out of circulation. They convinced a cooperative judge that, for Christ's sake, he should be institutionalized. And so it was that Jesus found himself ensconced at the Asylum for the Religiously Insane.

Although feeling perplexed by and resentful of his incarceration, he was philosophical about his circumstances. After all he had experienced worse situations. Some of his fellow inmates included self-flagellators, pedophiles, self-professed apostles, prophets, saints, demons, God communicators and, his favorite, imitators of himself. All were obviously in great need of his help.

When not helping these needy, Jesus devoted part of his time to retrospection.

He wondered, if had he not been executed, particularly by gruesome crucifixion, would Christianity have ever been born and flourished? His

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time for prospection was spent pondering how he could right the world by helping the poor and oppressed. But first he needed to escape.

Fortunately, since the security at the Asylum was lax, it did not take a miracle for Jesus to escape, just help from some of the other needy. With the aid of the janitorial night-shift crew and dressed as the same, as the sun rose, Christ merely walked out as one of their own.

Because he was now at liberty, his few remaining followers wanted him guarded at all times. Assassination, not further incarceration, was their concern. But Jesus refused their protection, insisting that he must be free and accessible to anyone and everyone and unimpeded to launch his crusade for the needy.

Without an entourage, Jesus preached about good versus evil and how to make this world a better place for all. But a better world for all meant less for those who have more - and wanted even more. And it was the "have mores" who had had him institutionalized. Thus the lines were drawn between the haves and the have nots. Christ organized all forms of protest-marches, strikes, sit-ins, camp-ins. He became the Lord's rabble rouser.

The haves reacted accordingly. Jesus had become not just an anachronism. He was now a menace to humanity and had to be stopped - once and for all. And while there was no scarcity of people, and their organizations, that desired him stopped, it was left to the Church of the Honest-to-God Believers to take action and decide his fate.

So it was at a meeting of the Church's patriarchs where it was concluded that Christ's "re-death" was the only way he could be stopped - once and for all. Also, that it was only fitting, contemporarily and historically, that the manner of his death be by chemically assisted crucifixion.

As easily as Jesus had escaped from the Asylum, he was abducted by the Church's ad hoc "Rapid Implementation Posse" and clandestinely transported, via the Church's limousine, to their secluded 20,000-acre retreat and into the V.I.P. guest house.

Unlike the first time, there was no bogus Sanhedrin trial. There was no trial.

This time he was neither flogged, mocked, beaten, spat on, clothed in a purple robe nor crowned with thorns. Instead, at the appointed hour, he

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was solemnly marched to the top of a hill where a twelve-foot-tall cross-shaped gibbet was stationed. He was then unceremoniously (no prayers) sedated by the Church physician (an obstetrician) and strapped (no nails) to the cross.

This time it did not take nine hours for him to die, it took forty-eight. And in his final hour, despite the sedation and dehydration, he gazed up to the sky and yelled, “Father I tried, but it was all in vain” and finally, “Thank God, I am going back to where I belong.”

# Love at First Sight

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What with the demand from medical schools and individuals desiring dead bodies, for the willing and adept, snatching and selling them in 19th century London, England, could be a remunerative occupation. For William, it became his lifelong calling.

As a young boy he had fled the family farm in search of fame and fortune. Alas, his lack of the requisite disposition and skills meant that they were not to be found. Instead he was obscure and penniless.

In desperation, William gravitated towards a life of crime. He tried picking pockets, but it necessitated too much coordination and bodily contact with the victim. Robbery required dialog from the shy lad and burglary too much complexity and courage. He was dismayed.

By some cosmic coincidence, one full-mooned night, while walking past a cemetery, he was startled to see a man hauling away a body in a wheelbarrow. It was then that he first discovered the art of body snatching.

After some inquiries, he learned that, because of the demand for corpses, the police turned a blind eye to the practice. And if caught, unless the culprit stole buried valuables, the offense was a mere misdemeanor.

Robbing graves, but never burking, was a crime William could commit. It was the perfect trade. The job was easy to execute and required little courage. If so inclined, he could readily converse with the corpse. And, his only contact with the body was after they were dead.

William was born for this line of work. In the briefest of times, he had devised a foolproof plan. Daily, he would peruse the death notices for a candidate corpse, making certain that the deceased had not succumbed to an infectious disease. He would note the location of the cemetery and at the appointed time and day, watch the burial from a distance. He now had his bearings. The coppers and the night watchmen were never attentive.

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That evening, he would stealthily retrace his steps to the fresh gravesite. Using a sturdy wooden spade (metal could be noisy), he would deftly remove the dirt from the top of the grave. In moments (the graves were shallow), he would hear wood on wood. A quick, but quiet, pry would open the coffin. With a rope around the corpse, after a few tugs, he would be on his way.

With the price and destination pre-negotiated, William would deliver the body to the client, collect the cash and be back in bed by dawn. What could be easier? But this line of work could take its toll.

He lived alone in a decaying room above a pub. He only companions were his colleagues. Women, including the bar wenches, kept their distance; his work was too ghoulish.

Then on what would become a memorable, dark, dank and dismal night, William entered a small, but posh, cemetery. For fear of others, he was vigilant. For fear of him, and others like him, some family members were also vigilant, guarding the recently deceased's grave.

But not the grave with the ringing bell.

William raced to that grave and frantically shoveled. Swiftly he jumped inside, pried open the casket and, to his relief, discovered the body alive. And, with his heart pounding, that she was a beautiful young woman. Keely, grateful to see someone, particularly this young man's sweaty, beaming face, tearfully embraced him. It was mutual love at first sight.

With shovel and hands, they quickly refilled the grave and hastily departed. Back in his room and Keely revived with the help of blankets, a warm fireplace and food, she told her sad story, speculating about how she must have wound up in the grave and why she must spend the rest of her life incognito.

She told of an arranged marriage to a much older, wealthy, prominent politician, Frederick. Her parents were ecstatic; Keely was despondent. But understanding her station in life, she was prepared to play the part of the loving, loyal wife and mistress of the house. Unfortunately, although Frederick was willing to be loving, he was not willing to be loyal, not with his own mistress in the house - their cook, Liz.

Liz also understood her station in life, but another life would soon join the house - Frederick's and Liz's child. After the fewest of words, and



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in a hasty manner, Frederick purchased the poison, Liz laced Keely's food, Frederick's physician declared Keely dead, and a hastily arranged private funeral service and brief burial took place. The only concession to Keely's family, who all suffer from die-hard taphephobia, was that she be buried in a Vester's Burial Case, with bell; it saved her life.

After a short spell below ground, Keely regained consciousness. While screaming for help, she felt a cord brushing her nose. Pulling the cord brought the ring of the bell and, in rapid succession, the sound of a shovel meeting dirt and then her casket, the feel of fresh air and the sight her love.

Considering his occupation, William was not anxious to report the matter to the coppers. Keely was convinced that, given Frederick's prominence, if she went to the authorities, he would have her committed, for life, to an insane asylum. But, with William's help, she would have her revenge.

It was another dark, dank and dismal night and Frederick was on his way to his favorite bordello. Suddenly another man bumped into him, mumbled his apologies and moved on. Frederick did not give it another thought. William proudly grinned and put the key to Frederick's house in his pocket. A copy of the key was made and during Frederick's return home, William unnoticeably slipped the original back into his pocket.

Some nights later, Frederick strolled away from his home with Liz two paces behind. In accordance with Keely's carefully orchestrated plan, she and William used the snatched key copy to sneak inside. They speedily moved to Frederick's study, removed his law school diploma from the wall and made a number of attempts to unlock the safe.

His birthdate was not the key, nor Liz's. Keely foolishly tried her own birthdate. She tried every conceivable combination, for naught. In frustration, she replaced the diploma. In desperation, she tried its issuance date. Voila, it opened.

Keely sifted through the safe's contents until she found a file that, if made public, would have devastating consequences for her estranged husband. Later that week, the story reporting the gist of Frederick's file was found on the front page of *The Times*.

After the exposé's publication, in a not-so-hasty manner, Frederick was humiliated, prosecuted, tried, convicted (by judge, not jury) and

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committed suicide - by poison. He was buried next to Keely's empty grave. His bell never rang.

Keely and William snatched his body and sold it to a hoary, aged, necrophiliac, with a preference for prominent politicians.

Together, Keely's and William's careers prospered. She managed the business and he snatched, but never robbed, the bodies. They lived happily ever after. Till death did them part.

# Our Basement Band

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*“So you want to be a rock ‘n’ roll star? Then listen now to what I say.”* So sang Jim (aka Roger) McGuinn, of The Byrds, on my favorite radio station. Hearing his (and Chris Hillman’s) lyrics rekindled fond memories of the time, decades ago, that my bandmates and I endeavored to follow their advice.

Jim continued to sing, *“Just get an electric guitar, then take some time and learn how to play.”* None of us had ever taken any music lessons. Instead, we read some instructional books. But more often we intently listened to the recording of our favorite songs and dreamt of becoming rock ‘n’ roll stars.

It seems that we had known each other our entire lives. As youngsters we had played at each others’ homes and on the same sports league teams. We enjoyed the same music, so why not form a band? Maybe the girls would take notice of us - *“If you make the charts, the girls’ll tear you apart.”* Sang McGuinn.

Forbidden elsewhere, we were confined to practicing in the basement of my house. There was no room upstairs and besides my stay-at-home mom protested that the noise was “intolerable.” Practice was limited to when Dad was not home and never on the weekends.

Although she realized that our musical talents were limited and could not understand why we enjoyed this “racket,” Mom was the band’s sole supporter. And, because she encouraged our passion, in short order my bandmates gave her the appellation Band’s Mom.

We played the music so loudly that Band’s Mom insisted we wear ear-plugs. She did the same. Our abdominal cavities resonated to our instruments’ good (?) vibrations, while Mom’s upstairs bric-a-brac (including her miniature bust of Johannes Brahms) would dance to the rhythm of the music.

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Our practice sessions were always a struggle. Trying to play in unison and finding the right notes, particularly chords, was, well, trying. But, we never argued and had so much fun making music. We were soul mates. We were bandmates.

Jim proceeded to sing, *"Then it's time to go downtown, where the agent man won't let you down."* But he was wrong. No one, including any of our friends, would represent our fledgling band. Worse, despite our dedication to the art, we were not offered a single gig. With the exception of Band's Mom, our parents were disinterested and unhelpful. Our high school principal put us on the bottom of the waiting list to perform at school dances. Our enthusiasm was flagging.

Then one day, a local television station announced that it would be hosting a Battle of the Bands contest. Always our champion, Band's Mom took us to the audition, which lasted for hours. In the absence of any apparent discernment, to our astonishment, we were invited to participate in the competition. Perhaps it was our angelic harmonizing.

We were also surprised when all of our parents and siblings attended the first round of the contest. Our band arrived similarly - and stylishly - attired. We were ushered into a waiting room where some makeup was applied to our faces and instructions given about how to comport ourselves. While waiting our call, we nervously hummed songs, tuned guitars and tapped drumsticks.

At last our moment arrived. There must have been at least 200 people in the audience, all ready, when cued, to applaud and whistle. We took our positions and stared at the intimidating bug-eyed cameras. We sang, strummed, drummed, rocked and rolled.

We made the semi-finals and, to our glee, we were suddenly the focus of some attention. Throughout the week, we were congratulated by classmates (including the girls), teachers, even the principal. Shopkeepers, bus drivers and strangers offered us a "That a boy!"

Our parents started to attend our rehearsals - we were no longer just practicing. They constantly interrupted to offer "suggestions". They selected the music, the same music they had always detested. They began to bicker among themselves: who should play lead guitar, who should sing lead, who was too loud, who was showing-off, what should be our order

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of appearance when entering the stage and how should we be positioned on-stage. Despite their inexperience in such matters, they were relentless. Making music became not so much fun.

To my annoyance, my grandmother insisted that, nightly, I wear a clean pair of my underpants on my head to “train” my hair to stay combed back. She thought it important that every hair be in place and that everyone should see my “gorgeous face.”

Band’s Mom, mustering more courage than I had ever seen, banished the other parents from any more practice sessions - but she insisted that I wear the underpants. Through it all, we anxiously counted down the days till the show.

The day arrived. Along with our immediate families, some of our whooping, hollering and cheering classmates and neighbors were in the audience. Our makeup was applied - no need for instructions. On the wall monitor, all of the contestants were able to watch and listen to their competition perform. Some of these bands sounded very good; most looked better.

When our turn arrived, once again, despite our parents’ coaching, we randomly strolled on stage, stared into the cameras and performed our same singing, strumming, drumming, rocking and rolling. To our continued astonishment, the panelists judged us fit to compete in the finals.

We were not prepared for all the ballyhoo that ensued. The television station hosting “The Battle” broadcasted an hour-long program about the finalists, including personal interviews and biographical sketches. There were articles about us in the school and local newspapers. People asked for our autographs. Our school principal even organized a pep rally in our honor.

Our parents insisted that they re-insert themselves into our practice sessions - after all, their standing in the community was at stake. But, to our relief, Band’s Mom held firm, telling them that we were “under enough pressure without their meddling.”

During the pre-finals practices, my mates and I tried to focus on what it would be like after we won. More often, we worried about how everyone would react if we lost.

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In addition to our now extended families, it seemed that the entire population of our high school, including the principal, and neighbors attended the crowning event. When not on stage, all of the competitors watched the monitor and simultaneously practiced our respective routines and rituals. Some of the other bands sounded and looked terrific. We all battled to win.

Onstage, competing for the final time, with sweaty palms, we once again stared into the cameras and performed our same singing, strumming, drumming, rocking and rolling. The audience enthusiastically applauded. We bowed.

After another commercial break and with all the contestants on stage, this last episode finally culminated when the program's host stepped up to the microphone, professionally paused to create some suspense, faced the camera, opened the envelope and announced, "And the winners are...."

Through the applause, cheering, and Band's Mom sobbing, we stepped up to receive our second runner-up trophy. We posed for photos, often with strangers. We signed more autographs. We were quasi rock 'n' roll stars.

Our fame put the band in demand - even without an agent man. We went to the top of the school dances waiting list. We were paid to play at all sorts of celebrations; Bar Mitzvah's were our specialty. There was not a weekend when we were not entertaining somewhere.

Jim ended the song with the words, "*The money, the fame, the public acclaim, don't forget what you are, you're a rock 'n' roll star!*" Sadly, our fame and public acclaim did not last long. Our voices changed, no longer angelic. Our harmony was no longer harmonious. And life had other priorities, academic and otherwise.

But we did make money. Mom wisely invested my earnings and it helped defray the cost of my college education.

Today, ever the entertainer, Roger (still formerly Jim) McGuinn is still performing as a soloist. As for me, when in a nostalgic mood, I will take my guitar out of the stairwell closet and belt out a few tunes. But without my bandmates, making music is no longer so much fun.

So Jim/Roger, in the words of Leo Robin, "Thanks For The Memory."

## Born in the U. S. of A.

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Wondering why it must all be her fault, Jendyose sat stunned in the office of the Right Reverend of her church. It had only been a shocking brief time since she had been raped by idle drunkards in her East African town and rejected by her parents. He counseled her that she must marry immediately. He told her that old Akello was seeking a new young wife and would be willing to marry her and care for the bastard child. The Right Reverend told her that she should be grateful and accept the offer.

Jendyose had known Akello her entire life. She had witnessed the death, due to abuse, of his three previous wives. As was expected of her, she was willing to accept God's will, but she wanted something better for her daughter. She wanted her to live in a land of peace, freedom and opportunity. She wanted her daughter to be born in the U.S. of A. and, as would be her birthright, to become its citizen. American citizens cannot be deported.

Her church had taught her to read and write and her brothers taught her how to use the church's computer. The device was her window to the world - books were scarce in her town. The device taught her about American citizenship. The device would help her find a God-loving American family.

Jendyose placed a message on the blog of the North American "sister" church that was in "full communion" with her own. The message read, "I am a young African seeking an American family to adopt my unborn child. Must guarantee she will have U.S. of A. citizenship. I am anxious for your response." She impatiently waited for a reply.

Nearly 8,000 miles away, Judy sat stunned in her obstetrician's office. After many visits to many fertility clinics, it was now undeniable; she was infertile. She and her husband, Chester, had considered adopting a child, but the waiting lists, foreign and domestic, were interminably long and the process byzantine.

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After university, they had married and dedicated themselves to each other, their religion and their careers. Children were for the foreseeable future, but that part of their future had become frustrating. But now, in their moment of need, the pastor of their parish assured them that their faith would find them a child and so they began to peruse the blog on the church's web site to try to learn more about their options. And there it appeared, Jendyose's miraculous message.

Their electronic dialog began cautiously. They exchanged biographies - Judy's and Chester's were prolix, Jendyose's brief - and photos. The former's included snapshots of their house (interior and exterior), cars, neighborhood and places of work and worship. The latter's were of her family and church. They shared their hopes and aspirations for the child.

As the relationship evolved and their excitement grew, they began to discuss the details. There would be no devils. Jendyose found the laws regarding birthrights and citizenship too ambiguous. She was concerned that giving birth to the child in her home land and then having her adopted to secure citizenship was too risky. So she insisted that the child must be born on U.S. of A. soil. She concocted a plan whereby she would enter the country, bear the child and, before her visa expired, Judy and Chester would secure for her daughter a certificate of citizenship.

The couple were not accustomed to acceding to other peoples demands, but an immigration lawyer, who was a member of their church, thought the strategy had merit and would meet everyone's needs. With help from the lawyer and through the connections of a college classmate of Chester's, they were able to swiftly secure a H2B visa for Jendyose. To consummate the agreement all three took an oath that was sanctified by the pastor and Right Reverend that would be more binding than any legal document.

Judy and Chester arranged for Jendyose's round-trip airline ticket. She gathered what few bits of clothing she owned and wondered what it would be like to experience snow. The Right Reverend gave her a blessing, her brothers wept and her parents reluctantly escorted her to the bus stop.

Her sixteen hour flight was thrilling. She had read about jet travel on the Internet, but the exhilaration of climbing into the clouds and above was beyond her imagination. The on-flight food was foreign to her palate and the entertainment overwhelming in its choices.



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As the jet began its descent so did her mood. Would there be problems at Customs and Immigration? What would it be like living with this American couple? Would the birth be difficult? Would her daughter be healthy?

Meanwhile, along with a throng of others, Chester and Judy anxiously awaited her arrival outside the exit for International Arrivals. Their housekeeper had prepared the guest room for Jendyose. Using the excuse that they wanted Jendyose to participate, they purposely left the baby's room undecorated. Truth be told, they wanted to wait until they were certain that all was well.

Despite her concerns, Jendyose experienced no difficulties in passing through Customs and Immigration. The officials wished her a good stay. As the glass door slid open, among the multitudes were Judy and Chester holding a banner that read "Jendyose - Welcome to the U.S. of A." There were smiles, tentative hugs and inquiries about her trip.

During the long drive to Judy and Chester's suburban home, Jendyose was awestruck by the vast size of the highways and the speed at which the vehicles travelled. But as they approached the city and the roads became clogged with immobile cars, she thought she could walk faster than the cars moved. But the snail's pace of the traffic gave her an opportunity to read all the endless signs advertising products and services that she had never known existed.

Jendyose was dumbfounded by the size of Judy and Chester's palatial home. She wondered if the couple were of royalty or related to a high governmental official. Chester left them at the doorstep and drove on to his office. Judy, prefacing herself with the words "I know you must be exhausted," gave Jendyose an exhaustive tour of the house.

It was more than Jendyose could comprehend. Having lived her entire life in the same tiny house, which lacked interior walls, electricity and plumbing and was smaller than Chester and Judy's garage, she could not understand why anyone would need such an immense home. It had so many bedrooms, bathrooms equipped with showers, tubs and bidets, studies, TV rooms - can a television screen be that large? - closets and a swimming pool with spa. All the different household appliances were beyond

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her imagination and she thought it would take her days to total the number of windows.

Jendyose settled into her room, but not her routine. The meals were bountiful both in volume and variety. She had never seen so much food. They constantly coaxed her to eat more, telling her that it was good for the baby. She kept trying to insist that the baby would be fine. She wanted to help around the house; they insisted that she rest and leave everything for the housekeeper.

Well before Jendyose's arrival, Judy had made an appointment with a new obstetrician - her former one brought bad luck. Jendyose found the waiting room filled with women at various stages of gestation. Pregnancy, a caucasoid complexion and conspicuous wealth was their common denominator.

The obstetrician shared two of his patients' common denominators. He greeted Jendyose with a warm paternalistic smile. She was asked many questions, stuck with a needle, weighed, poked, prodded and instructed to urinate in a cup. The fetus was spared any such scrutiny. As he handed her a pamphlet, his parting words were about prenatal care.

Jendyose's first Sunday morning in America was devoted to attending Chester and Judy's church. The congregants were affable but aloof. They were anxious to learn about her church in Africa and its efforts to recruit new members. The participation of the parishioners during the service was muted. There was little singing, praising of the Lord or joy in the service. It all seemed more like a social gathering than a tribute to God.

With mother and neonate developing nicely, Chester broke out his camera to take endless photos of Jendyose and her tummy. Judy made numerous entries in a computerized baby diary. The software enabled her to document every facet and phase of the child's early development. It allowed the user to prepare graphs, calendars and charts. Jendyose also wanted to be a "user", but Judy insisted that she could manage.

They also rapidly converted one of the more spacious bedrooms, certainly larger than Jendyose's room, into the nursery. The walls were papered with images of animals - many from Africa. The room was furnished with a huge canopied crib that included a mattress and box spring set specially designed for infants. Other furnishings included a dresser, bookcase, desk,

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coat rack, bench with drawers and a Persian rug. The room also had stuffed animals, one larger than Jendyose, a sophisticated audio/video surveillance system and an abundance of toys.

With time another visit was made to the obstetrician. His state of the art ultrasound machine confirmed Jendyose's expectation. It was a girl and it was time to name her. They fired up the computer and searched hundreds of names. Each day brought an agreement on a different name. They considered African names, American names and even African-American names. Finally and amicably, they settled on the name "Shandi" - which means God is gracious in African-American. And so "SHANDI" was painted onto the footboard of the crib.

For Jendyose, the most painful part to the process was interviewing prospective nannies. It would be one of them, not Jendyose, who would care for, nurture and dote on Shandi. It would be one of them who would be a part of those memorable years.

Her contractions brought Chester and Judy rushing Jendyose to the hospital. A wheelchair awaited her at the door and in a matter of minutes she was taken to the delivery room. It had more medical technology than the obstetrician's examining room. It would have been unimaginable to find such things in her town. More often than not, if her country was at peace and the women not forced to flee, they would give birth in the same room in which they were born.

Jendyose insisted that she be not be given any medications, including anesthetics or sedatives, or even an episiotomy. She wanted her daughter to be born as practiced in her country. With his habitual paternalistic, but now incredulous, smile, the obstetrician acceded to her wishes.

Soon thereafter, Mother and daughter, the latter weighing in at a healthy six pounds, eight ounces, were doing fine. For different reasons, they both cried. For different reasons, Chester and Judy did not.

Soon thereafter, for the last time, Mother, with daughter in her arms, was anxious to return to the solitude of Chester and Judy's house. Jendyose did not consider it as "home" because she thought she was regarded merely as a guest. With only a moment's pause, the obstetrician discharged them and passed the case over to the pediatrician.

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The first postpartum days were chaotic. Shandi wanted to be fed frequently. Jendyose wanted Shandi to sleep alongside her, but Judy, thinking that mother and daughter should not bond too closely, wanted Shandi to sleep in the nursery. More to Jendyose's exasperation, the nanny supervised the breast feeding.

It seemed to Jendyose that she and the nanny were always competing for time with Shandi, whereas Chester was content to take many photos and Judy was delighted to make entries in the baby diary.

The days were also filled with constant company. Relatives, multigenerational, and friends, personal and professional, came to congratulate the "parents," praise the child and bestow her with gifts.

The same immigration lawyer and Chester's college chum arranged for the expeditious issuance of the certificate of citizenship document. Soon thereafter, Jendyose was interviewed by the social worker at the adoption agency. She signed all the papers and prepared, mentally and physically, to return home.

While packing she gazed at her photos of Shandi. The thought of leaving her was more than she could endure. With Chester and Judy at work and the nanny at the market, mother and daughter took to the streets and a bus bound for the city. With Shandi wrapped in her arms, Jendyose roamed some less than desirable streets seeking guidance from the Lord.

She found a church that miraculously had a shelter for the homeless. Unlike the obstetrician's office, the facility housed people mostly of her skin color. Some individuals had lived on the streets for years, some battered, many mentally ill. There were also many families, with children of all ages, who had, for various reasons, lost their homes. Their common denominator was this refuge.

Judy and Chester were worried when they discovered that Jendyose and Shandi were not at home. By early evening only their pastor could quell their panic. He assured them that it was pointless to contact the police and that it was now in God's hands.

The next morning Jendyose and Shandi returned. There were hugs, smiles and tears. Jendyose explained why they left and where they spent the night. She gave no reason for her return - she was uncertain herself.

## Just Enough Words

During the long ride to the airport, Jendyose considered her future. Returning to her village would mean a life she could not live. Perhaps she would go to the capital and work in an orphanage. She surely did not want another child.

There was a spectrum of emotions at the airport. Jendyose's good-byes with Judy and Chester were emotionless hugs and utterances of best wishes. With teary eyes, she gently embraced Shandi and quietly whispered her a farewell. There was so much she wanted to tell her daughter, but had only enough time to give a few precious words.

With one last wave she entered the security gate. Walking along the concourse, she toured the various shops, all predominantly staffed with people of color and filled with food, jewelry, colognes, clothing, electronic gadgets, books and much more.

Being reminded of this nation's wealth and opportunities, she exited the airport and boarded a bus. With a broad smile, she alternately gazed out the rear window to watch the airport disappear and joyfully out the front window to see the city appear. She was determined to be reborn in the U.S. of A.

# Dear Gabby

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May 25, 2010

Dear Gabby:

I am a 51-year-old former elementary school teacher, who had a wonderful life both in and out of the classroom. I especially enjoyed dancing. Sadly, some 20 years ago I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. It began as the relapsing-remitting form, but I do not know why people refer to it as benign - there was nothing benign about it.

Then I began to experience fewer remissions to the point that my list of symptoms seemed endless. More often I felt fatigued, I had difficulty keeping my balance, swallowing and had problems with my bowels. I was nearly always in pain. Frequently I became despondent, not because the disease may shorten my life but because of the poor quality of my life. It was a miserable existence and there were many days when I was uncertain that life was worth living.

My disease had reached the point where none of the medications my doctor had prescribed were giving me any great relief. Then I read on a web site about a new treatment in Europe developed by a Doctor Paulus Icy that was called "Stasare." There were testimonials from patients who described the procedure as "miraculous." One national TV program even described it as a "cutting-edge treatment." So in desperation, I decided to have the treatment.

My doctor made it clear to me that the treatment had not been properly tested and was very controversial. He strongly urged me to wait until it had been proven to be effective and was approved by the government. But the talk on the web sites was that this would never happen because then the MS doctors would be out of business.

## Just Enough Words

I found a clinic in Bulgaria that was willing to treat me. The cost of the trip and the treatment was more than I could afford, but my friends, relatives and members of my community came to my aid. They organized auctions, dinners, bake sales and parades to raise the money.

The local newspaper wrote an article about me and the fund-raising campaign on my behalf. It even included a photograph of me. I had become something of a celebrity. I had never received so much attention.

My trip and treatment were uneventful and, by the time I returned home, I felt so good I was ready to do an Irish jig. The tingling sensation had disappeared. My balance had improved and, most importantly, I had more energy. I was euphoric. This could mean an enduring remission. I was quick to tell all my supporters the good news.

The Bulgarian doctor had told me that my symptoms would improve with time. I was so expectant. But he was wrong. Within about two weeks after my return, I felt like I had never had the procedure. I was devastated.

I know deep in my heart that my temporary improvement was all in my head. I wanted so badly to feel better. It was mind over matter. I feel like a fool.

Now I am faced with a dilemma. Do I tell everyone that the treatment was a sham or do I continue to pretend as if all is well? After everything that has happened, I think that I would feel humiliated if I told them that the procedure never benefitted me. They dedicated so much of their time and money to help me. Or should I tell everyone the truth? I could procrastinate, but how many other people might then waste their own and their supporters' time and money?

Desperately Seeking an Answer

Dear Desperately Seeking an Answer:

Tell everyone .....

# The Bullet and the Tree

---

When walking the streets of Jerusalem, it is a good habit to be on the lookout for dog dung. But on this day, while strolling on Keren ha-Yesod, my vigilance instead found a bullet from a semi-automatic weapon. This observer's reaction was three-fold. The first was surprise - after all this is not Mogadishu. The second was sensible - Israel is a defensive nation where a significant portion of its people carries weapons.

It is difficult to ascertain the number of small arms in Israel. But, considering that nearly all members of the armed forces carry weapons (even off-duty), as well as guards at most major public and private buildings, gatherings and even school tours, there must be millions of guns. Israel is an armed nation. Consequently, bullets become lost.

My third reaction was pragmatic; how do I dispose of the bullet? This live round can kill. Elsewhere I would find a police station. But as I was near the Prime Minister's residence, which is always surrounded by heavily armed guards, I headed in that direction.

As I approached the area, a guard approached me. I must have looked suspicious. With a disarming smile, I wished him a good afternoon and showed him the bullet. He was now both suspicious and perplexed. Maintaining my smile, I rapidly explained the circumstances by which I came upon the ammo and asked him to take its custody. Despite his frown, I handed him the bullet and thanked him and he walked away.

Some days later, while still maintaining a watch for canine crap, I sighted a small potted tree located in Shema'IA Barukh Hefets square. The tree had been planted "In memory of the victims of the terrorist attack at Ben Yehuda Midrachov, Saturday night, December 1, 2001."

This attack was a bombing and was not the first at this location. The first occurred in 1948, before Israel was even a nation, and was followed by six others: twice in 1975 and again in 1976, 1979, 1997 and 2001. A total



## Just Enough Words

of 97 people were killed and 496 injured. The bombers, some of whom killed themselves, were either Arabs or, in the instance of the first bombing, British Army deserters in the employ of the Arabs.

Bombs have not been the only murderous *modus operandi* of such terrorists. Elsewhere, bullets, although less efficient, have also been utilized. The Mercaz HaRav yeshiva massacre occurred on March 6, 2008. Firing several hundred bullets, an Arab killed eight and wounded eleven students. He was shot dead by two members of the Israeli Army who were former students at the yeshiva.

Sadly, sometimes Israeli bullets also kill innocent victims. For example, there was the notorious Hebron massacre wherein 29 people were killed and another 125 wounded by an American-born Israeli and his assault rifle. The survivors beat him to death.

Or just two years after the carnage at Mercaz HaRav, on March 20, 2010, two youngsters were killed in a village near Nablus by bullets fired by Israeli soldiers. Like other shootings, the victims' deaths are controversial and under investigation. The number of such shootings and investigations increases.

I know not the fate of the bullet I handed to the Prime Minister's guard. May it not find its way into anyone's body. And, may the tree no longer weep leaves for those fallen to terror.

# Dialing for Dollars

---

This is a tale of two sons and their father. Both apples fell far from the tree - and rolled down hill.

Son One lives the American dream. Son Two its nightmare. Son One earns an inordinate salary but is in the depths of debt. Son Two hovers just above the poverty line.

Son One resides in a palatial 7,000 square foot home with five bedrooms, six bathrooms and a five-car garage - with a car for each. Son Two inhabits a squalid 1,500 square foot apartment with three bedrooms, one dedicated to his securely locked marijuana “garden”; two bathrooms, one inside the garden; and no garage to protect his dysfunctional car from continuous vandalism and theft.

Son One has three children, all attending the most prestigious private schools money can buy. Son Two also has three children, all attending the local subpar public schools.

Son One and family, when not at their country or boat clubs, are vacationing. Son Two and family attend no clubs, in the country, on the water or otherwise. Vacations are but a dream.

Distant disdain would best describe the sons’ relationship. They never got along, nor agreed on anything - except their detestation for their father. Father, the solitary parent, has led a meaningful, financially fortunate - but frugal - life. Then he died.

The sons are disappointed to learn that Father bequeathed them nothing, except an opportunity to earn a cash purse. The will instructs the potential payees to meet at an address where they will receive further instructions.

The home is isolated and nondescript. They are greeted by an unnamed man wearing a knee-length white lab coat and holding a clipboard. In the living room the sons are shocked to see a metallic box with a large dial

## Just Enough Words

numbered from 1-100. It is plugged into an electrical socket on one end and wires leading to an electrode attached to a wrist clamp at the other. They are told that the challenge involves one of them delivering electricity to the other.

The Coated Man invites them to sit down on the couch and explains the rules of the “challenge.” Turning the dial increases the amount of electricity to the electrode. Each number on the dial represents the percentage of the total purse they can pocket. The amount of the purse will not be divulged to them until after the challenge is completed. Completion is when both brothers decide to stop the challenge.

Before they begin, the sons must decide if they want to participate and, if so, which of them will be wired to the electrode and how they want to divide the proceeds. The stupefied sons shake their heads when asked if they have any questions.

The Coated Man then leads them to an adjoining room and instructs them to use this opportunity to make their decisions and plan any strategies. After 11 minutes of yelling, cursing and crying, they emerge from the room. Son Two will be strapped to the electrode. He will also get 56% of the money.

The Coated Man positions Son Two in the chair facing his brother and his left wrist is clamped to the electrode. To protect against skin burns, the Coated Man applies some electrode paste to provide better conductance. He then walks over to the metallic box, flips on the power switch and the box starts to menacingly hum.

With clipboard and pen in hand, the Coated Man pronounces, “Shall we begin?”

Son One: Let’s start with 20%.

Son Two: What! We agreed to start at 5%. We have no idea what these shocks will do to me.

Son One: I thought you would be less nervous if we moved things along more quickly.

Son Two: Five percent, right!

Son One: OK.

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Son One quickly turns the dial to 5 and presses the On button. The tingle startles Son Two. Five seconds later a timer ends the pulse.

Son Two: OK, I survived the five.

Son One: We just made five percent of the purse.

Son Two: Yeah, whatever that means.

Son One: You ready to try 20?

Son Two: No 10.

Son One turns the dial, presses the button and for five seconds his brother has some noticeable muscle spasms.

Son Two: That was quite a jolt. I am not sure I can take much more.

Son One: Come on bro, it did not look that bad. Let's take a leap and try 20.

Son Two: I don't know, this could really do me some damage.

Son One: It's just five seconds and we will double our money. Are you with me?

Son Two: Yeah, OK.

A turn of the dial, the press of the button and Son Two gasps for breath and feels a sharp pain in his stomach and chest.

Son Two: That's it. I'm finished.

Son One: Come on. People in the electric chair feel much worse. Keep going. We are doing great.

Son Two: What is this we shit. I am the one that's suffering. We don't even know how much money we will get. Look how he lived. It wasn't like you.

Son Two - Don't be stupid. He made it to the top of his profession. Of course he had money. Just because he didn't spend it doesn't mean he didn't have it. He saved it for us but

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wanted us to earn it. How about we go a little slower? Let's try 25.

Son Two: OK, but that's all.

Another turn, another push and Son Two cried out that he is having a heart attack.

Son Two: You going to kill me. Is that what you want?

Son One (with a smirk): No. You are of no use dead. Look, you already have a greater share than me. I'll give you another five percent if we set the dial for 40. We are going to be rich. Think about all the things you can buy with the money. Let's go for broke.

Son Two: I'm not the one who is broke. Fifteen percent more for me and set the dial at 27.

Son One: What! You are killing me. Ten percent.

Son Two: OK 10. Set the dial for 37, and that's all.

Dial at 37, button pressed and Son Two shrieks, leaps from the chair and faints.

Coat Man checks Son Two for a pulse and revives him.

Coat Man: Are you alright young man?

Son Two: No.

Coat Man: Do you want to continue?

Son Two: Hell no. Anymore will kill me.

Coat Man: Very well. Son One, do you agree?

Son One: I guess. We made only a lousy 37%. I should have taken the shocks. I would have lasted much longer.

Coat Man: Very well.

Coat Man gestures towards the couch and both boys sit. He removes a sealed envelop from his clipboard.

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Coat Man: First, I knew the voltages that were being delivered and was authorized by your father to terminate the challenge if the person receiving the electricity was in danger.

Son Two: Did you know my father?

Coat Man: Yes.

Son One: How?

Coat Man (after a long pause): That is unimportant. Now second, inside this envelop is a note from your father and the amount he set aside for this challenge. Who would like to open it?

Son One reaches for it; Son Two grabs it away.

Son Two: I'm the one that suffered.

He quickly reads the note and exclaims "I don't believe it!"

# History Becomes Legacy

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The harbored town was founded and populated by the defeated emigrants of the American Revolutionary War. Some “Loyalists” came because they could not afford to return to England. Others joined seeking adventure, opportunity and fortunes.

Building a new town in the middle of the wilderness would be arduous, tough and taxing. But with the Crowns assurances of support and protection, the town was destined to thrive.

Unfortunately the town was also founded on misinformation and poor planning. In this wilderness, the farmers found unusable land. To this wilderness, craftsman brought few useful crafts and merchants stocked mostly useless merchandise. Inevitably, within a short time after sailing into their promised land, bickering, brawling and rioting lead the population that had once flowed to 10,000 to eventually ebb to 1,700.

Despite its inauspicious beginning, the town did celebrate, with reenactments, fireworks and fanfare, its 225th anniversary. But the intervening years have not been kind to the kind members of this town - and this is made plain by its contrasts.

It is a town where the asphalt on the streets buckles and pot holes abound, but the snow is always promptly removed. It is a town with more trucks than cars, both without mufflers that muffle, but where drivers are quick to stop and allow pedestrians to safely traverse its streets.

It is a town where, during local elections, the campaign signs are outnumbered by the “House for Sale” signs, but where elected officials practice good governance and the mayor has an air-traffic-control-shaped tower perched on the roof of his house.

It is a town where the community hall is crowded with residents gathered for fat-laden potluck dinners, dances and especially bingo games, all provisioned with copious amounts of alcoholic beverages. But

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on different days, the same halls are slightly less crowded with Weight Watcher's, Alcoholics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous meetings.

It is also a town where the only funeral parlor advertises in the Wellness section of the local newspaper, but where the entire town will mourn the loss of anyone in the community.

In this town, words like "vision" and "revitalization" are continuously uttered. In this town, the police routinely report in the local weekly newspaper such serious "calls for service" as noise disturbances and misdialled 911 calls. No murder, no mayhem plagues this town.

The town's railroad track divides the population. At one time trains actually traversed those tracks, but now there is no reason - and no rails. Those who prefer to wear white collars, sip their beer and bandy about at the Yacht Club. Those partial to blue collars, swig their beer and exchange gossip at the local saloon.

There have been brief periods of progress and prosperity, first by steadfast and stalwart entrepreneurs, later through government largesse. But it has never lasted. The clock on the town tower is stuck at 4:02. The town is in stasis.

Then fate provided the town with a chance to alter its course. On a bright, sunny, early fall day, word whisked through its streets that, in three weeks' time, a passenger cruise ship would put into its port. Its passengers and crew would tour the town, view the homes built by its founders and visit the museums where its history was exhibited.

All were convinced that the town's fortunes were about to change. This would be the first of many cruise ships to visit. It was just a matter of putting best feet forward to impress the ships occupants of the town's attractions.

Committees and sub-committees were hastily organized. Egos were ignored. Cooperation was at its best and so was the town. Rarely in its history had the town rallied with such enthusiasm. The excitement was palpable.

The plans included some of the locals, dressed in 18th century period garb, to row boats, replicas of those used during the town's founding, out to the cruise ship as it sailed into the harbor. The local reenactment society, also dressed in period garb, setup a tent encampment. Their activities were to include the dancing and musical entertainment of that time.



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Museums that had been closed for the season reopened. Circus-sized tents were erected to house exhibits, demonstrations and vendors selling foods and crafts. Retail establishments hung banners welcoming the cruise ship's occupants. Picnic tables blanketed the landscape.

In addition to the nearly two thousand passengers and crew, it was estimated that an equal number of people from the surrounding area would partake in the affair. It was to be a festive day for all.

The day before the ship's arrival, the town waited with great expectation and excitement. The locals toured the sites and discussed tomorrow's prospects. The town had a sleepless night.

Dawn arrived with unforeseeable near gale-force winds, heavy rain and no cruise ship on the horizon. Its captain had prudently decided to put the ship into the safer port of a nearby famous tourist town.

The aftermath was sad to witness. The only people who toured the rain-soaked, wind-blown town were the local gawkers coming to see the debacle. They saw the tents and fences of the reenactment campsite blown to the ground and its drenched inhabitants huddled in their cars to keep dry. They saw other tents, although still standing, being hastily emptied of exhibits, foods and crafts. Worst of all, they saw the forlorn and desolate faces of the participants. Their mood was as gray as the sky.

Then a brief two hours after the cruise ship was scheduled to arrive, the weather the town wished for that day suddenly appeared. The winds abated, the sky cleared, the sun shone - but spirits remained gloomy.

Sadly, the town's history remains its legacy. The town is still in stasis. The town clock still reads 4:02.

# It Happened on the Holiest of Holy Days

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It was about halfway through the service on Yom Kippur, the holiest of holy days, when suddenly and swiftly the ushers closed and then bodily blocked, the sanctuary doors and the rabbi appeared at his lectern. The secular portion of the yearly ritual was about to begin.

As a prelude to this event, admission tickets for this service had been issued to all of the members of the synagogue. But these tickets were not just ordinary passes to prayer. In addition to having the member's name and address printed in the center, on its periphery were tabs labeled with denominations ranging from \$25 to \$2,000.

Using such requisite words as obligation, commitment, duty, support, help, and generosity and phrases such as in these trying times, find it in your hearts, we must all come together, for the sake of the synagogue, it will be a mitzvah, and finally, bless you all, the rabbi made an impassioned solicitation.

The president of the synagogue then took the microphone to recite the words: "Thank you, Rabbi, for those eloquent and fitting words. My fellow members, please take a moment to fold back the tab of your choice. Or if you want to make a more generous donation, just write down the amount on the back of your ticket. Then please pass them down your row to the ushers at the end of your aisle. Let me remind you, we make this plea only once a year." That was a bit of a fib.

Of course passing along the tickets gave the neighbors in the rows an opportunity to see who donated what. But that was not really necessary. After the tickets were collected, they were handed to the president who, after a quick review of the results, handed them to the rabbi. He, with various levels of enthusiasm, depending on the amount donated, read aloud

## Just Enough Words

the names and the amounts of each donation. The sounds of groans, mumbles, sighs and ahs echoed throughout the sanctuary.

Without a pause, the rabbi then segued into his standard 20-minute High Holiday sermon.

Finally, with the sermon said and the pledges to refill the synagogue's coffers in hand, the doors were reopened and many of the congregants fled the sanctuary to relieve themselves, gossip about the amounts promised and by whom, or to catch up with the score of the World Series.

Meanwhile, as the cantor chanted, the rabbi seated himself. To his left was a microphone from which he could effortlessly direct his flock to the next prayer. To his right, in the seat of honor, sat the president of the synagogue. The congregants could see that the two were engaged in a serious conversation. Was it about the amount of this year's donations? Was the synagogue nearing a fiscal precipice??

No, they were reassured to hear. Instead of listening to the cantor, the members heard the rabbi and president chatting about the World Series. The rabbi had left on his microphone. Some of the worshipers wondered whether this was sacrilegious. Most were amused. But how long could this comedy continue? And who should tell the rabbi about his faux pas??

Suddenly and swiftly, a thousand or so eyes saw a paper plane sailing from what seemed to be the heavens and miraculously onto the astounded rabbi's lap. The same number of ears heard a deep rich baritone voice from above say "Good aim." Despite the occasion, it was neither the hand nor voice of God. The observant noticed that they both originated from behind the curtain of the choir loft.

With the same thousand or so eyes upon him, the rabbi unfolded the plane, read the note scribbled inside and, with his face turning crimson, sheepishly crumbled the note and stuffed it into the right pocket of his robe. He nonchalantly turned off the microphone and, for good measure, cupped his hand to the president's ear and whispered words that would remain their secret.

The rest of the service was uneventful. The rabbi conducted the congregation, the cantor chanted, they all prayed.

## **George Francis Reid**

### **BUT THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY**

Some days later, the rabbi's wife shuffled into their laundry room. As was her habit, she carefully checked all of her husband's pockets for items that should not go into a washing machine. Reaching into the right pocket of his robe, she found a crumbled piece of paper. Ever curious, she neatly flattened it with her wrinkled hands, reached into her apron pocket for her reading glasses and read, HEY ABE, YOU HAVE A BIG MOUTH. TURN OFF YOUR MICROPHONE!

# The Samurai Swordsman of Bealsiopolis

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Good afternoon, one and all. This is Victor Verbose from the Intergalactic On-The-Spot News Network reporting today's top stories. President Clinton has reversed a 20-year ban by authorizing the sale of American fighter jets to Chile. Ford Motor Company announced the strongest car and truck sales in eight years. Governor of New Jersey, Christine Todd Whitman, signed "Joan's Law" into effect. The law denies parole to future child molesters and is named after seven-year-old Joan D'Alessandro's, who was raped and murdered by just this kind of offender.

And in Tokyo, a bill was introduced into the Diet to punish adults who pay underage prostitutes for sex. Also in Tokyo, Godzilla film maker, Tomoyuki Tanaka, died at the age of 86.

Also in the news, drug smuggler, Jorge Cabrera.... WAIT, THIS JUST IN! Apparently some guy, waving a sword in downtown Bealsiopolis is having a standoff with the police. For more on this incredible breaking story, I take you now to Chuck Chatter, live in Bealsiopolis.

Yes, Vic, I am standing on the corner of Second Avenue and Seathl Street, near the world-famous Jimmy's Farmers Market. And, as you can see, there is a large crowd being held back by the police while they try to subdue this guy brandishing a Samurai sword that has to be about three feet long.

According to some sources, the swordsman is a 34-year-old man who was just released a year ago from a mental institution after he assaulted someone. I am told that, since then, he has wandered the streets of this majestically mountainous city, usually drunk and muttering to himself.

The police have the man completely surrounded and have their pistols and rifles aimed at him. There also seems to be much discussion about how to apprehend the guy. Fifteen years ago, in a somewhat similar situation,

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police in another city controversially tried to subdue another sword-wielding man. Tragically, after stabbing one of the police officers, that man died in a hail of bullets. So this time, they want to show more caution and restraint.

The traffic near this corner has come to a standstill and the police have started to divert it to other locations. The crowds here just keep growing. But oddly, the local merchants are complaining that this guy is bad for business.

Some in the throng of people are taunting the police and their inaction. Others are yelling advice to the police. But everyone in the crowd is encouraging the man they have dubbed the Samurai Swordsman.

Well, thank you Chuck. For the man's sake, I hope that the police will not have to harm him. We will return to this story as it develops.

And to return to our other news, congressional investigators have learned that drug smuggler Jorge Cabrera was, in fact, asked by a prominent Democratic fund-raiser to make a contribution to President Clinton's re-election campaign.

### ELEVEN HOURS LATER

Also in the news, the Coca-Cola Company introduced a new aluminum can for its Sprite drink. The side of the new can will have embossed bubbles and indented silvery streaks that set off the word "Sprite." Wow, that should catch the customers' attention.

We now return you to our live correspondent, Chuck Chatter, who is on the scene in Bealsiopolis where the stand-off between the police and the deranged fellow with the sword continues to unfold. Chuck, this certainly has been a bizarre day in Bealsiopolis. Are the police any closer to apprehending the fellow who has been dubbed the "Samurai Swordsman"?

Yes Vic, it has certainly been a bizarre 14-hour standoff between the Samurai Swordsman and the Bealsiopolis police. As you can see, he continues to swing his sword and make martial maneuvers. Much to my surprise, he has also urinated on the wall and even lain down on the pavement. The crowd is impatient and restless. They want some action.

And, it's not just the people here on the corner of Second Avenue and Seathl Street who want to see this end. Both the police and the radio talk show hosts have received phone calls with suggestions about how to

## Just Enough Words

apprehend this guy. Some have suggested throwing a net over him, others shooting him with tranquilizer darts and a few have even suggested killing him.

The police have not used any of this advice, but they have made some resourceful and imaginative attempts to take him into custody. They tried to bribe him with a Francescantonio's fish sandwich and money in exchange for his sword. His sister, police psychologists and mental-health experts have tried to talk him into surrendering.

They doused him with water and then blew cold air on him with a fan, hoping that it would make him hypothermic, leading to less muscle control. They have fired projectiles at him filled with gas, wood, rubber and Styrofoam. They tried pepper spray and an irritant gas. They have even hurled bean bags at him. But the man has stood his ground.

That's all for now Vic. WAIT, SOMETHING IS HAPPENING! The police have turned a fire hose on the guy and the water pressure has pushed him against a wall. Now he is down on his knees. Now he is on lying on the ground, almost in a fetal position, trying to protect himself from the blast of the water. It's got to hurt.

Now four policemen have raced in, one has a rifle pointed at him, two have pinned him down with a long ladder and another is using a long pole to hold down his right hand which is holding the sword. Now they are slowly trying to pry the sword out of his hand. I think it's all over now.

Yes, the ordeal is over. The police have him handcuffed and two paramedics have arrived and have injected him with what is probably a sedative. They have put the man onto a stretcher, strapped him down and are taking him to the ambulance. They will undoubtedly be taking him to one of the local hospitals for psychiatric observation.

This is Chuck Chatter reporting to you live from Bealsiopolis. Back to you, Vic.

So, folks, as you saw, after 11 hours the standoff between the Samurai Swordsman and the Bealsiopolis police is finally over. The man has been captured using a fire hose and ladder and is now in custody. You don't see something like this every day.

Elsewhere in the news, at the UN, the Security Council announced that its current number of peacekeepers will remain the same in Haiti until

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July 31. The U.S. warship Nassau, with 1,388 Marines on board, remains off the coast of Zaire in case any Americans have to be evacuated. India and Pakistan have announced that they will hold peace talks next week. The DNA testing of murdered child JonBenet Ramsey has begun.

And finally, this, Universal Studios and Shell Oil company are installing automated kiosks in Orlando, Florida. The machines will dispense tickets to theme parks and other central Florida attractions. They can also make reservations to hotels, restaurants and movie theaters.

This is Victor Verbose from the Intergalactic On-The-Spot News Network providing all the news, all the time.



## You Have ... But I

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“You have cancer and I am sorry to tell you the prognosis is poor,” says Dr. Bulkley. “But I feel fine,” protests Carter. “Maybe this is a mistake.” But Dr. Bulkley patiently tells Carter that the results are not in error and reaffirms that this particular late-stage tumor is uniformly lethal.

Carter receives the death sentence with dread and asks about his options. Dr. Bulkley replies that although there is no cure, aggressive chemotherapy could extend his life by a month, or more. He continues that another option could be to forgo the ill-effects of the drugs and, when the time is appropriate, receive palliative care. That way, whatever time he had remaining could be spent in comfort. Carter started to stoically surrender to his fate.

Carter always found taking long drives helped to put life in perspective. After telling Dr. Bulkley that he needs time to think, he slides into his sports car (how he loved the sound of its throbbing rear engine) and found himself touring the streets of his youth. It had been a time of fun and invulnerability. His thinking starts to focus on two salient questions: how does he want to die and how is he going to tell his friends and family - he and Eileen would soon celebrate their fifth wedding anniversary.

Telling them of his diagnosis and prognosis leaves them in shock and sobbing. His insistence that he does not want to subject himself to chemotherapy leads them to protest and plead. They bombard him with a relentless salvo of arguments. He can beat this disease. He has always been a rebel and a fighter. Maybe the chemo or one of the many treatments sold on the Internet, might save him. What does he have to lose? How will he know unless he tries? How can he just give up? It is not fair. Finally, his mother, the elementary school teacher, tells Carter that she “wants him to be tardy for his death.”

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Fair to whom, Carter wonders. Nevertheless, despite his own dictates and desires about how he wants to live out his final days, for the sake of his loved ones, he agrees to undergo treatment.

Days after reaching his fateful decision, Carter meets with the oncologist referred by Dr. Bulkley. Dr. King asks if Carter is certain about his choice. Carter gives an uncertain yes. Reluctantly, Dr. King gives Carter an “everything you wanted to know, but were afraid to ask” pamphlet about the chemotherapy and what he would experience. The section about side-effects and how they can be mitigated is lengthy and nauseating.

Some more days later Carter arrives unaccompanied (he wants to be alone) at the Chemotherapy Infusion Center for his first treatment. His mood is contrary to the bright sunny weather. He checks in with the receptionist who, with the briefest of smiles, hands him more paperwork to complete. He is asked questions about his personal and medical history. He waives his rights of ever becoming a litigant.

The waiting room has institutional replicas of artwork hung on smudged walls and threadbare carpeting throughout. The tables are covered with aged and well-thumbed magazines and literature stands containing information about the most common cancers.

The room is packed with patients whose skin tones range from pale to jaundiced. Most wear hats or colorful scarves. Others prefer the “bald is beautiful” look. Some are emaciated and many require a cane, walker or wheelchair. A few converse; most nap.

As he sits down, his neighbor turns to tell him that he has been waiting for more than two hours for his treatment and that Carter should expect the same, if not longer. He further explains the waiting room wisdom - the latter in the day your appointment is scheduled, the longer you wait for treatment. The nurses and aides try to keep everyone on schedule, but something always goes wrong.

Three hours after his appointed time, Carter is escorted into his assigned infusion room. It is outfitted with an adjustable bed, two uncomfortable chairs, a television affixed to the wall, a VCR/DVD player, a wall phone, a cupboard filled with medical supplies and a trash can with sticker attached that reads “Biohazard, Universal Precautions Must Be Observed.”

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While Carter tries to acclimate to this intimidating environment, Bill, the nurse assigned to Carter's treatment, is having a frenetic day. The patients have been incessantly complaining. He wants to leave on time, but as usual he is behind schedule. He collects Carter's prescription from the pharmacist, who is having an exasperating day, particularly with the new intern constantly distracting her with inane prattle.

As Bill enters the room, he finds Carter staring out the window at the panoramic view of the hospital parking lot. Bill introduces himself and asks Carter the same medical history questions. Bill fastens an identification band to Carter's left arm. Carter resignedly remarks that he already knows his name. Bill grins.

Bill takes Carter's temperature and blood pressure and measures his heart rate. He then hooks the drug-filled bag to the mobile stand, inserts a needle containing a drip chamber into one of the bag's septum's and threads the tubing from the bag through the infusion pump and onto another needle.

Carter has a foreboding sensation as the needle is inserted into one of his veins. He wonders if this ordeal will help him beat the odds. Bill informs Carter that the treatment will last about two and a half hours. He shows Carter the location of the call button and tells him that, when he feels a chill, he will bring him layers of warmed blankets. As he exits the room, he asks Carter if he wants the door open or closed - some patients prefer privacy, others companionship.

Carter starts the treatment lying on the bed sipping cups of coffee supplied by an aged aide. After just a bit more than an hour he inevitably feels a great urge to relieve his bladder; he has both consumed and been infused with a considerable amount of fluids. Pushing his mobile stand along, he launches into the long walk down the corridor to the toilet room.

As he passes by the other infusion rooms, he notices that many of the doors are closed. Where the doors are open, he finds some of the patients are watching the television, others are conversing with friends, family or the telephone, still others are sleeping. Most have blankets.

His constant companion, the mobile stand, presents a challenge to entering the toilet room. The door opens towards the inside and bumps into the toilet. It is only with difficulty that he is able to get both himself

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and his companion inside the room, close the door and urinate. He wonders how, under these circumstances, anyone manages to sit on the toilet. Once relieved, a look into the mirror reveals a pale and sweating face.

With more difficulty, he manages to vacate the toilet room and make his way back to his room, not stopping along the way for any beverages. Leaving his door open, he crawls back onto the bed. He does not watch the television, converse or sleep. He simply watches, drip by drip, the chemo-infusion bag slowly empty.

With the bag emptied, the pump stops and a irritating alarm beeps. It continues to beep until Bill returns and flicks a switch. He removes the needle, swiftly examines and questions Carter and bids him a farewell along with some words about the drugs side effects.

As he drives home, Carter's mood begins to brighten. Driving his car is always good therapy. Before the chemo takes effect, he wants to enjoy both a good meal and night's rest. And, so he does.

Neither Bill's parting words nor Dr. King's pamphlet have forewarned Carter that by the early morning he would feel dizzy and have trouble breathing and that his heart would beat so rapidly. His wife frantically calls the "911" emergency phone number and keeps reassuring him, and herself, that he will be fine.

In what seems like a blink of an eye, Carter is rushed to the hospital, worked up in the Emergency Department and admitted to Intensive Care. Notwithstanding many heroic efforts, as he gasps for breath and his heart races to the point of exhaustion, Carter collapses into death.

Carter's case is reviewed at the hospital's next monthly Morbidity and Mortality conference. From the lectern, Dr. King announces that the autopsy report indicated that Carter has died from acute lethal myopericarditis. With a solemn sigh, he also states that the toxicology report indicates that Carter's blood had many times the prescribed amount of anti-cancer drug. Carter has died of an erroneous drug overdose. Dr. King closes his presentation with silence.

The funeral service includes photos and a video of Carter. The eulogists recall the happy times they have spent with him. One remembers his passion for his beloved car, another how healthy he appeared before his diagnosis. It was difficult to believe that he was sick. They remark about the

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fragility and preciousness of life. The service ends with laughing, crying, hugs and tears. They all tell his wife that they will be in touch. It is an emotional and memorable weekend.

Gail's weekend has also been memorable. The weather has been splendid and she and her boyfriend spend the time at the local lake. Although recently hired and should be punctual, she arrives at the office just a bit late and is booting-up her computer when she receives a phone call from a Tad Mazdak, an assistant in the records department at the pathology lab. She writes down his message and places it on Dr. Bulkley's desk. Hours latter he reads: There was a clerical error. Carter Mallory does not have a tumor. Tad apologizes for the error and hopes that it did not cause the patient any inconvenience.

## Extortion in the Family

---

Gramps began his morning by spitting blood into the sink. He had recently celebrated his sixtieth birthday with about one hundred close friends and relatives. And, as had been his daily habit for the past 46 years, what better way to mark the occasion than to enjoy another good smoke - preferably a cigar.

All his early morning sit-ups and push-ups had not prevented the blood in the sink. Now Gramps peered into the mirror with the same sense of dread that he had felt seven years earlier when a car collided with his. Would he also survive this calamity?

Within a week after listening to his physician, in an orderly manner, Gramps informed his family and friends of his diagnosis and poor prognosis. They were quick to rally around him and to offer vague assurances that all would be well. They lavished him with affection, food and incessant chatter. They also wondered what portion of his wealth they would receive. There was a wife (whose only words of endearment to him were "you don't know what you are talking about"), children, many grandchildren and more - all wondering.

As expected of anyone with a high net worth, there was a will. Its contents of which were only known to his lawyer and himself. It had been changed many times during the past few years. His thinking was always a function of his disputes with family and friends.

And so it was, with the attention of family and friends, that Gramps announced what he would bequeath; he wanted to see their reactions. His sons immediately filed a lawsuit against him for mental incompetence. After all, who in their right mind would give that much money to underserving others? And, there was so much money to give.

Gramps had come to immense wealth from poverty and how he amassed that fortune was part of his persona. Starting work in his early

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teens, he toiled in the steel mills to pay for his schooling and eventually earned two professional degrees. With the war and its aftermath, the country had become heavily industrialized and he became an industrialist.

Neither son was lacking money. One, schooled with funds given by Gramps, was a physician. The other, although unschooled, was a senior executive in one of Gramps' companies. Thanks to his largesse, both sons attracted beautiful wives, sired many children, resided in palatial homes and possessed boats large enough to sail the seas.

Time and events quickly passed. Despite all the chemo and radiation therapy, the tumor grew unabated. Gramps, when not being treated, passed his time either meeting with his lawyers or in the courtroom. There were many discussions about an out-of-court settlement, but neither side would compromise. Gramps had adamantly decided the fate of his money and his sons had similarly decided that he must then be insane. There was much cursing, finger-pointing and beating of chests. And then the conflict escalated beyond father and sons.

One of the sons appeared at Gramps' doorstep. He was not there to reconcile with Gramps. He did not even want to see Gramps, or Grandma. He was there to extort money from his visiting sister.

A victim of the Depression era and its avaricious bankers, in his apartment Gramps hid millions of dollars in negotiable bonds. Their location was known only to him, Grandma and their daughter. The son wanted the bonds, and in exchange, both sons promised to withdraw the lawsuit and end the agony that had ensued.

The sister, acting impulsively and without conferring with anyone, but having her parents' interests at heart, went to Gramp's bedroom walk-in closet, took a shoe box containing the bonds from the top shelf and handed it to the son. The two sons were more moneyed. The lawsuit continued unabated.

Gramps and Grandma never accepted nor forgave their daughters decision. Eventually, with the lawyers excessively compensated, the matter of the sons versus Gramps was settled out of court. The sons would receive more money, the other heirs less.

Soon thereafter the ravages of his treatments took their toll on Gramps and he was hospitalized. Soon after that a grandson was by his side and, as

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was their custom, they went for a long walk and talk. But unlike past walks and talks, this time Gramps turned to this grandson and asked for his help. He wanted to commit suicide.

Shocked and speechless, the grandson finally asked Gramps why he would make such an absurd request. His reply left the grandson even more shocked and speechless. It was due to neither the effects of the toxic drugs nor the debilitating radiation. It was because of his family, his loved ones, that he had made his plea. He was sickened by the outcome of the settlement and his son's deceit. Most of all, it did not even bring an end to the family bickering. No longer could he find a reason for living.

The grandson reminded Gramps that he loved him dearly and thought that he was capable of doing anything for him. With tears in his eyes, Gramps nodded. The grandson asked if he understood that he would spend many years in prison for assisting in the suicide. Gramps laughed and dismissed the idea with the wave of a hand. Gramps' fate was sealed.

He spent a few more months at home, the bickering and recriminations with his loved ones never far away. Finally he was placed in a luxurious hospice. The same grandson found Gramps cadaverous, diaphanous, seemingly asleep and surrounded by many of his loved ones. The death watch had begun.

The grandson asked if he could spend some time alone with Gramps and the group reluctantly filed out the door. Whispering in his ear, the grandson asked Gramps if he was afraid to die. Gramps slowly opened his eyes and, in a voice faintly above a whisper, said, "Yes."

Surrounded by some loved ones, Gramps died a lonely man. Not many eulogies were spoken at the brief funeral service and only a few tears were shed. The will was read, the riches divided - and then swiftly spent.



## Good Come

---

We first met when I was confined to a cage and he - whom I have facetiously named My Master, or MM for short - was in need of a canine companion. MM lavished me with toys, chew bones, clothing, matching collars and leash, and expensive, exotic delicacies from the pet bakery. After I was neutered, he had the veterinarian insert artificial testicles into my scrotum.

We shared his bed and his food. With his absence, I had the run of the house. In exchange, I would give him a lick - loved the salt, not the lotion. It was a delightful coexistence.

MM would tell me “Caleb: come, heel, sit, stand, stay, down, roll-over, fetch, release, bark, no, look at me, good dog” and “I love you” as he wrapped his gangly arms around me. I had no idea what he was saying or why he would sometimes get angry. This made our walks in the park perplexing.

Our bi-daily outing always started with MM dressing me (that always gave him a grin) collaring and leashing me and leading me out the front door. While we walked, even in rain, snow or sleet, I would yank him along, while he, with his arm parallel to the ground and me diagonal to the same, would yell, “Caleb, heel!” What is a heel?

After we entered the park, he would unleash me and I would romp, pee and poop - leaving him holding the bag. MM would amble along at a distance. Oftentimes we would play chase. He would extend his big arms and try to catch me and I, just as he got near, would race away. He would laugh and the game continued until I eventually allowed him to catch me.

Other times, MM would remove a ball from his pocket and throw it a distance for me to retrieve. Reflexively, I would give chase, but would soon lose interest with the silly routine. Inevitably, MM would sigh, collect the ball; then the exercise would be repeated. It seems that there is the making of a new breed of human - the Ridiculous Retriever.

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Our routines would end when MM would leash me and we would return home with me leading the way and him yelling “Caleb, heel.” It was a pleasurable, but puzzling, coexistence.

Then one day our outing became bizarre. It began as usual. MM (still grinning) dressed, collared and leashed me, led me out the door and, to the command “Caleb, heel,” I would drag him to the park . After I was unleashed and relieved, I decided to follow an intriguing scent. He followed me in his usual fashion, but as time passed and the sun started to set, he grew anxious.

“Caleb, come! It’s time to go home.” Not knowing what he was saying and caring less (still no source for the scent), I continued my hunt. Gradually, He became increasingly animated and agitated. He tried cajoling me (“Don’t you want to go home and have dinner?”), pleading (“Come on, Caleb. I want to go home.”), hollering (“Caleb, do you hear me? I said come!”), cursing (“I said come, you fucking dog.”) and threatening (“If you don’t come this instant, there will be no treats.”; another time, “I’m going to kick your ass.”). It was all incomprehensible.

His face (tears, purple skin, bulging eyes and veins) indicated that something was amiss, but his problems could wait. Instead, I followed my instincts and the scent.

Then, to my confusion, MM acted like he wanted to play our chase game. With his arms extended in the usual fashion, he would race towards me, once tripping and screaming “Ouch. Damn.” He tried to approach me by crawling, tip toeing, even rolling. He laid on the ground and tapped the same. Once he was no more than a fingertip away from me, but I both playfully, and artfully, resisted his embrace and continued my quest.

I finally lost interest in the scent (it was not that intriguing) and laid down to enjoy the cool grass. MM instantly stopped shrieking at me. He slowly limped towards me, all the while repeatedly cooing “Good Caleb.” Suddenly he pounced on top of me, reattached the leash and victoriously exclaimed, “GOOD COME!”

# Caught on Crete

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It was a little-known tragic day in history. While reading the June 9th edition of my favorite national newspaper, I fell upon an article about the 60th anniversary of the sinking of the Tanais during World War II. The confiscated Greek freighter, bound from Crete to Athens, was sunk within 15 minutes by a British torpedo off the coast of Milos. But what most marked this event was the ship's human cargo. Within its hold were Greek and Italian prisoners and Cretan Jews bound for the death camps.

The date haunted me because three years, almost to the day, before the sinking of this vessel, I had been captured on Crete by the Germans and later shipped to Athens via a similar route. My saga began in 1938. I was 17 years old. With an abusive step-father, docile mother and much rage to vent, I needed an adventure. I joined the British army. I was called out for military service a month before war was declared on Germany; my adventure began.

I quickly became a noncommissioned officer, (family legend has it because I was the smallest person in my unit). I was part of the famous Green Berets, under the command of the nearly as famous Colonel R.E. Laycock. We set sail from England, bound for the Middle East, in February 1941, knowing that the Germans had advanced in Africa, Yugoslavia and Greece.

We also knew that, because of its strategic importance, Crete would be next. But what our command had not anticipated was the new strategy the Germans employed to attack the island. We were out-manned, out-planned and out-gunned. German superiority, in all respects, left devastation, destruction and death in their wake.

Operation Mercury descended on Crete the morning of May 20th. The invasion began with an aerial offensive, delivering bombs by aircraft with names such as Junker, Heinkel and Stuka, all protected by others named

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Messerschmit and Focke-Wulf. With the German air force controlling the sky and Allied defenses rendered nearly useless, for the first time on such a massive scale, paratroopers by the thousands, followed by gliders arrived next. It soon became apparent that, unless reinforcements were immediately sent, the island would soon be under German control.

Laycock's commandos, about 800 men in all and dubbed Layforce, landed in Souda Bay the night of May 26. Despite the darkness of the night and the occasion, I was impressed with the beauty of the island and its rugged cliffs and gentle waters. But as we landed, that tranquil moment soon departed.

Due to one military blunder after another, serving as a rear guard armed only with rifles and machine guns, we soon found ourselves heading south and over the mountains to the port town of Sfakia. Our orders were to impede the German onslaught as the Allied troops beat a hasty retreat toward the town and the various vessels that awaited them.

The battle of Crete ended with our mates chaotically massed at the beaches near Sfakia, desperately awaiting evacuation from the island by whatever ship, or even dinghy, was available. It was not our finest hour. It was *deja vu* Dunkirk.

The evacuation rules were clear - the first troops on the island were the first to leave. Colonel Laycock did manage to be amongst those to leave, but many of us, officers and enlisted men alike, were left stranded. All told, some 600 of the original Layforce were either killed, missing or wounded.

My entrapment became multidimensional, both in space and time. One moment I was stranded and facing the sea, watching the last of my comrades-in-arms embark on the last boat for Egypt - they would soon be back in the fight. In what seemed like only a brief span of time later, I was being shelled by German mortars from the hillsides to the north. We were soon captured; my fighting days were over. I had joined to fight and to vent my rage. Instead, I was now a prisoner, harboring even more rage.

The enemy found us hungry, cold, exhausted and defeated. I faced the victorious arrogance of my captors with the scorn of the vanquished. We were disarmed, interned into hastily built encampments and told about the exceptional amenities of the POW camps in Germany.

## Just Enough Words

The next day the Germans started us on our 30-mile forced march back north. We received no food and little water until the second day. This time the mountains seemed more difficult to climb and the heat unbearable. Our parched mouths kept us anxiously looking for any pool of water. Many of my fellow prisoners collapsed by the roadside. Surrounding us were the bloated bodies of servicemen and civilians.

We finally arrived in Chania and were herded into “Galatos Camp.” The lines were long for our daily rations of food and water, but the guards occasionally permitted us to pluck fruit from the trees. Confinement was becoming unbearable and I marched along the perimeter of the camp for hours.

The frequent escape attempts hastened our departure for the mainland. The transport ship was filthy and overcrowded. Our latrines were pots whose contents we evacuated overboard. Five days later, via Athens, we arrived in Salonika, and force marched to an old Greek army barracks renamed Frontstalag 183. Most of my shipmates left the next day. My constitution caused my captors to select me for forced labour in the overcrowded camp for a month. Despite my exhausting labours, my temperament led me to walk the perimeter nightly.

It was a long 10 days to the POW camp, Oflag VB. We were herded into cattle cars, 35 officers or 55 enlisted men per car, which made it difficult to even lie down. Biscuits, tinned meat and water were our only rations. We rarely saw the light of day or smelled the fresh air.

I arrived at our destination famished, weary and leery of our new internment environs. To my surprise, we were greeted with a warm shower and the camaraderie of fellow prisoners. Morale was high. At last, there was daylight to see and fresh air to smell.

I was a guest in the POW camps for nearly four years. Although, as an officer, I was accorded better accommodations than the enlisted men, this was not the adventure I had envisioned for my youth. The guards kept me occupied with such engaging recreational activities as parading, gardening and sports. But the activity that raised my spirits was the custom of “high tea” that had been initiated by my fellow officers.

To pass the time, exercise their ingenuity and lift morale, they had built a still from skillfully stolen pieces of scrap metal. Raisins were the fermenter

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of necessity. Copious amounts of the liquid intoxicant were produced and heartily consumed - until our apparatus exploded for all to hear. While our hosts were relieved to learn that it was not a bomb, what remained of our device was confiscated. No more high tea time.

When I was not otherwise occupied, I fulfilled my military obligations by attempting to escape and disrupt the enemy operations. My enemy did not take kindly to those military obligations. To this day, I detest all things German, especially their guard dogs.

When I was not inebriated or attempting to escape, tedium and contemplation were my companions. Much time was devoted to pondering the horrors of war and the tragic consequences of our leaders' folly.

For 60 years since, I have attended many war memorial ceremonies. Some veterans told their stories; most wore them. Some of the non-veterans listened, most read, few comprehended.

For those same 60 years I have pondered one germane question: Would there be so many conflicts, or if conflict was inevitable, would military strategies be more considered if our leaders (civilian and martial) were the ones in combat?

*Author's Note - This story was, in part, based on the notes of a former member of Layforce, and is a tribute to that note keeper.*

# My Time in the Peace Corps Was Not Peaceful

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It was the late fall of a new decade. Melvin Kabiito's rule was in its final days and, although his opponents were imprisoned and the country in a continuous state of "emergency," most people of this African nation felt at peace. For all that, starting with my first day in that country, my time in the Peace Corps was not peaceful.

It might seem surprising that I would leave the comforts of my prosperous native land to help the natives of this less prosperous land. Perhaps it was my Jesuit education. I wanted a job that would benefit me by benefiting others and this led me to the Peace Corps and this equatorial country. Unfortunately, the Corps manual had not prepared me for what I was about to witness.

Events leading up to my departure were swift. Mother was fretful, father resigned and I ecstatic and excited. I collected and packed everything that was recommended in the manual. At the airport, I waved goodbye to my parents and their tears.

Sixteen long hours later, I debarked at the airport in their early afternoon, exchanged some of my greenbacks for local currency and gradually found the way to my temporary quarters at a hotel located in the center of the city. My excitement during the journey had left me sleepless and, although according to my biological clock, it was still the middle of the night, I thought it prudent to stay awake at least until sun down.

I folded all of my money into my passport, put it into my breast pocket and started to stroll the streets. My meanderings took me to the local market place. The area was crowded with hundreds of people who, with no sense of order or direction, slowly sauntered among the various vendors. A cacophony of sounds and a variety of foreign aromas filled the air.

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There were shop stalls that sold fresh meats (some still dripping blood and covered with flies) and produce. Some sold candies of brilliant colors; others household goods such as baskets and food utensils. An intriguing jewelry shop displayed gems of sizes and colors I did not know existed. The owner, an elderly woman with thin grey hair and smoky gray eyes, was bejeweled with rings on all her fingers and earrings that dropped to her jaw.

Despite her age, my pause in her store swiftly brought her to her feet and by my side.

Speaking English, she wished me a good day and asked what I wanted to buy. My polite reply that I was just admiring her goods only encouraged her to lead me by the elbow to a display of rings that were made, she claimed, with precious stones from local mines and set by local artisans.

She asked me what I thought the ring was worth, to which I had no reply other than a shrug of the shoulder. She told me that, because I looked like a good and honest person, she would be willing to sell it to me for \$100 - she insisted on dollars. I replied that I was certain it was worth that amount and that I would give it some thought. I wished her good day and proceeded to leave the store.

In an instant, she was at my side and, with each step, she lowered the price: "\$95, \$80, \$65, \$50." We both exited the store. "\$40, \$30," said she. I finally managed to extricate myself and could not hear what she yelled as I retreated to the safety of the swarms.

A few minutes later I happened to bump into a man who had, without notice, turned away from a nearby stall. He was a short, nondescript fellow and he immediately apologized in English for not looking where he was going. He asked what brought me to his country; I explained. He offered to serve as a guide; I declined. Not appearing the least bit disappointed, he wished me a "profitable" time in his country and we parted company.

After that amicable encounter, I continued to wander among the various streets and stalls to the point of exhaustion. While trying to find my way back to the hotel, I instead found myself near the old woman's jewelry shop. Suddenly I saw the same diminutive man whom I had recently met race out of her shop followed by the woman who pointed an accusatory finger at him while shrieking, "Murderer."



## Just Enough Words

The man started to flee and a crowd of men gave chase. To gain a better vantage point, I ran to the top of a nearby staircase. The crowd yelling “murderer” was growing larger - it seemed like this was a rallying cry - and others in the man’s path tried to impede his flight. It did not take long before he was surrounded.

Some began to beat him with sticks and stones. The more bold used their fists and feet. It was not long before the man, who had been lying on the ground in the fetal position, appeared lifeless. I was stunned. The sight of this brutal murder by a mob will haunt me forever.

Two policemen (one supervising the other), having passively witnessed the chase and murder, dispersed the mob. At first they prodded the inanimate body with their clubs. Convinced that he was dead, the supervisor rummaged through the man’s pockets and placed the contents into his own. They both gave the man the boot and left.

I was stunned by both the vigilante slaying and the complete disregard for his corpse afterwards. Being too exhausted to move as well as curious to see if someone would retrieve the body, I stayed perched until sunset. Except for the occasional person who stopped to kick the body, there it remained. He would probably become food for the four-legged night life.

I cautiously came down from the staircase and made my way back to my hotel room. I passed some cool water over my face and saw my pale and weary reflection in the mirror located over the wash basin. I prepared to go to bed, but while reaching into my pockets I discovered that my passport and money were missing. I selfishly reacted by thinking what else could go wrong today.

The manual instructed me to report the loss immediately. I jumped down the stairs and the night clerk pointed me in the direction of the local police station. While racing en route, I tried to recall if there had been any time during the day when I had needed the passport or money; I remembered none.

I entered the dark and dank station to find a policeman behind a tall bench at the end of the hall. I approached the desk and offered the policeman a good evening; it was not to be a night for such a salutation. After a long minute he stopped reading his newspaper, raised his head and asked, thankfully in English, how he could help me. I told him about my situation

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and he pointed towards a row of unoccupied chairs and told me someone would be out to see me shortly.

Forty-seven minutes later, an unusually tall, burly and officious-looking police officer called my name and, without uttering a word, pointed me in the direction of his office. It was more of a cubicle containing some certificates, photos and a file cabinet with a noisy fan perched on top.

In the center of the room was a small metal desk. He plopped himself comfortably down into a noisy reclining chair on his side of the desk and gestured to a uncomfortable wooden chair (with handcuffs shackled to the arms) located on the opposite side of the desk.

He took a moment to study my face and then asked, in English, me about my activities for the day. I relived my stroll through the streets and stalls and the murder by mob. I deliberately neglected to tell him about the two policeman. I also mentioned that, ironically, I had just met the man who was killed and that he did not impress me as a murderer.

The policeman glared at me but then, with the slightest of smiles, he opened his desk drawer and tossed my passport onto his desk. I opened the passport and, while thumbing through the pages, noticed my missing money.

He responded to my surprised and quizzical look by telling me that my passport was found in the deceased man's pocket. Apparently he was a pleasant thief.

I thanked him for the return of my passport, got up from my seat and extended my hand in gratitude. He did not take it. Instead he gestured towards the door. I started to leave then stopped. I told him that I had also met the woman from the jewelry shop and was curious to know who the man had allegedly murdered.

The policeman replied that apparently the man had run from the shop when the woman, thinking that he was a customer, started to approach him. His flight convinced her that he had stolen something and she had yelled "murderer" because she knew that no one would chase him down if she yelled "thief". I could only shake my head in disbelief and wonder if she had known he would be murdered.

With that, the policeman escorted me from the station. He extended his hand and said, "I suppose, like most other foreigners, you consider this

## **Just Enough Words**

jungle justice.” I shrugged my shoulders, shook his hand and thanked him again for his time and help.

As I started to walk away his parting words were “By the way, we did not find any jewelry in his pockets. Welcome to Africa.”

# Sabbath Ritual

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The Jewish Sabbath is meant to be a festive day. Free from the usual labors, this day is set aside to observe such rituals as the spiritual contemplation of life and the enjoyment of family. By Jewish law (halakha), 39 categories of activity are proscribed during this religious day, including the prohibition of driving automobiles, which violates the categories pertaining to the lighting (category 37) or extinguishing (category 36) of fires, and transferring between domains (category 39).

The Haredim, the most religious of the religious, regard their beliefs and practices to be an unbroken chain dating back to Moses. The men are bearded and attire themselves in dark suits and dark wide-brimmed hats. On formal occasions, some dress in long silk jackets and fur hats. The women make plain their modesty by being clothed in long skirts, long sleeves, high necklines and head coverings.

The Haredim of the Mea Shearim neighborhood of Jerusalem judge the prohibition of driving on the Sabbath solemnly and grievously. On this day, in addition to considering the spiritual and enjoying their families, they obstruct the persistent automobile traffic at the intersection of Shivtey Israel and Haneviyim streets, one block south of their neighborhood. Men, but rarely women, of all ages congregate at this location to participate in this ritual.

Their neighborhood, founded in 1874 by the original settlers of Yishuv haYashan and but claimed by the Palestinian Authority as a part of the future State of Palestine, appears as a world unto itself. At its entrance is a banner on top of a building stating, in Hebrew and English, *Groups Passing Through This Neighborhood Severally Offend the Residents. Please Stop This.* Welcoming they are not.

As this observer passed through that neighborhood, he was impressed by the decrepit buildings and the squalor throughout its streets. The poverty

## Just Enough Words

rate amongst the Haredim is about 60%. It seems that they are as impoverished as they are religious. Although they are rich in signs. Another reads, *To Women & Girls Who Pass Through Our Neighborhood. We Beg You With All Our Hearts. Please Do Not Pass Through Our Neighborhood in Immodest Clothes.* I wonder if men can pass through their neighborhood in immodest clothes.

On many days and in many ways, the Ultra-Orthodox Jews have exercised their God-given right to protest the desecration of the Sabbath. On that day, in addition to obstructing automobile traffic, they have demonstrated against movie screenings and even the opening of parking lots. After all, they reason, the fewer the motivations to drive or opportunities to park, the fewer cars that travel on the Sabbath.

They have even waged counter-protests by wearing yellow badges and demanding the presence of international forces to protect them from other Jews who were oppressing them and inciting the secular community against them. These other Jews had the chutzpah to protest the recent attacks by the Haredim upon young, less orthodox, neighborhood school girls. These girls, for the crime of being immodestly dressed, were spat upon and subjected to shouts of “whore” and “Nazi”.

By the thousands the Haredim have protested and counter-protested. They have cast stones and garbage. Equal numbers of riot police, some on horseback, others using water cannons, have tried to control the crowds, even as they were accused of being Nazis. In the aftermath, hundreds of the activists have been arrested. It appears that these Chosen People insist and persist in imposing their religious beliefs, rituals, prohibitions and all, on one and all. After all, God is on their side.

The Sabbath is not the only day of protest. On a Monday, at the same intersection near Mea Shearim where the weekly Sabbath demonstrations are held, the Haredim, in protest against the State of Israel, rioted against the observance of Remembrance Day - which honors the memory of the 22,684 soldiers killed in the line of duty and the 3,971 civilian terror victims. They burned trash cans, threw rocks at passing cars, tore Israeli flags and, just for good measure, blocked traffic. When the police appeared, they disappeared.

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By happenstance, one late Sabbath day, this observer was at that same blocked intersection when - violating those very prohibitions - a convoy of four police vans arrived. About 20 policemen, all armed with only holstered pistols, begrudgingly, frustrated with this weekly chore, emerged from their vehicles, casually chatted amongst themselves and then slowly formed a line parallel to the protestors. They slowly advanced on the congregated obstructers, who then promptly retreated back from the intersection. There were no physical interactions. Their respective actions and reactions appeared choreographed and routine

The Haredim then formed an opposing line in front of the entrance to their neighborhood. The police followed. There they both stood - a Jewish standoff. There was taunting from the Haredim and casual banter by the police. There they both stubbornly stood in their respective lines, facing each other until the sun started to set. Then like clockwork, the Haredim returned to their homes and synagogues and the police to their vans.

In seven days, the Sabbath ritual will begin again.

# How Could My Life End Like This?

---

How could my life end like this? I was a famous scientist (well, maybe notable) who, along with other scientists, was working on a cancer-curing drug that made the cover of a popular weekly magazine. My good fortune was going to make me wealthy. Instead my final days are spent in a hospice, destitute and dying from cancer.

People tell me that part of my problem was that I am self-destructive. Nonsense. I am a flamboyant man who pounces on every opportunity like a duck on a June bug. Consequences and people be damned; I deserved to be rich and famous. But let me tell you my sad saga and you can reach your own conclusion.

Even as a child growing up in East Oklahoma, the son of a construction engineer and a schoolmarm, I knew I was special and deserved whatever I wanted. I was bigger and smarter than others my age, smart enough to be accepted into a state university and eventually earn a Ph.D. I was opportunistic enough to select a field of research that would catch the public's attention and to profit from other scientists' discoveries.

I had worked in many laboratories throughout the U.S.A. and Europe leaving debts, both personal and professional, in my wake. I left it to others to clear up my extravagances. I had five wives and a child by each. And, despite my love for my children, soon after their birth, I readily divorced their mothers. My path to fame and fortune needed to be unencumbered.

Fate had provided me with that path. My area of research landed me a job at a prestigious medical institute. And I authored a book on the subject just as the field came into vogue and onto the cover of that magazine. Businessmen and bankers both wanted to pay me more money than I thought possible for a piece of my time and mind. So I bought a suit and tie and obliged.

## George Francis Reid

One of those businessmen and his bankers wanted to start a company, based on the work of others, to manufacture and test that promising drug. With me as Chief Scientist, they claimed, my name and institutional affiliation alone would attract millions of dollars. The road to reaching my goals was obvious; I left the institute and joined the new company.

Many months later, the company ran out of money before the drug was ready to make money. I found myself without a job, with a new wife (my former company secretary) and another child. I begrudgingly accepted a position at the local university. It lacked the prestige of my former institute, but I needed a salary.

Typically, I divorced my wife. But unlike my other former wives, this one relentlessly sought revenge. I managed to deflect her badgering but not the scissors with which she cornered me at a scientific convention. I was bandaged, she was institutionalized and our daughter became my roommate. Admittedly, she was an impediment on my road to riches, but I loved and nurtured her.

My wife thought differently and from her room in the loony bin she wrote a complaint to the authorities that I was abusing our daughter. The judge, who must have been as loony as my wife, agreed and, with my daughter kicking and screaming, made her a ward of its court.

It was during a supervised visitation that my daughter tearfully told me that she was being molested by her foster parents. Our pleas to her social worker fell on deaf ears; they had heard it all before. It was time for me to take matters into my own hands.

I carefully devised a plan to rescue my daughter. Timing and precise coordination was essential to its success. I made an appointment with the social worker and asked that my daughter be present. At the appointed time, an accomplice turned off the power to the office; I maced the social worker in the face, grabbed my astonished daughter and fled the state. Two grueling days later, FBI agents were waiting for us at my parents' home in Oklahoma. I guess my plan was not so carefully devised.

My daughter was returned to foster care while I was incarcerated in the local lockup and charged with kidnapping. The university terminated my employment. Jobless, again, and penniless, I launched a campaign to win my freedom.



## Just Enough Words

The court appointed an attorney who encouraged me to plead guilty in exchange for a lesser sentence. I dismissed him and, convinced of my innocence (how can a parent be guilty of kidnapping their own child?) and in defiance of the proverb, “A man who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client,” I carefully devised my defense strategy.

I wrote to former friends and colleagues asking them to contribute to my legal defense fund and bail. Few replied; even fewer donated. I remained underfunded and in confinement. Nevertheless, I vigorously defended myself in court but was promptly convicted by a jury of my peers and spent two years in a federal penitentiary.

Upon my release, mercifully, my former wives and children provided me with food and shelter. Determined to salvage my pitiful situation, this time I phoned former friends, colleagues and acquaintances looking for work, no matter how demeaning. There was always some feeble excuse why they could not hire me, or even refer me to a job.

For a brief while I earned some money as a self-employed street juggler. But I was destitute and these desperate times called for desperate measures, so I carefully devised yet another plan to make a fast fortune.

With copious amounts of liquor to fortify me, I walked into the closest bank, handed the teller a stick-up note. Within minutes I was under arrest, again. My plan did not account for the bank’s silent alarm nor its close proximity to the local police station.

Once more I found myself in the hoosegow. But this time I was without excuses, support and friends. The judge took into account my professional background and pitiful history. With early parole, I was determined to seek my fortune, again. But my many years of cigars and alcohol labored my breathing and jaundiced my skin. This cancer researcher had cancer.

A few of my ex-wives and children visit me regularly in the poor people’s part of the hospice. But most of what little time is left to me is spent arguing with myself about what went wrong. I was at the pinnacle of my career working at a prestigious medical institute. I was courted by businessmen and bankers. I was on the road to well-deserved riches. It took me 30 years to reach that juncture and less than ten to descend into humiliation, destitution and, too soon, death.

How could my life end like this?

# My Mama Has a Son in the Mob

---

After the baptism of the fifth child of my younger brother, Donny, the celebration and subsequent arguing commences. Their voluminous house is filled with noisy people, food and booze. Above the noise can be heard our Mama joyfully singing Donny's praises. "My Donny is such a great son, husband, father, provider and brother." There is no mention that he is also an extortionist, drug dealer, pimp, thief and probable murderer.

The episode reminds me of the wedding scene from a mafia movie wherein the females of the family are so proud of their sons, brothers and husbands. Each morning the males go off to earn another dishonest day's pay.

Mama and I have had several acrimonious arguments about Donny's profession. Mama says it is a "slight scratch" in an otherwise perfect person. I know all about his scratch and it is not slight.

Driving her home after the celebration, our discussion about the subject continues:

Me: Mama, your silence about his "profession" is tantamount to condoning his crimes.

Mama: Now you shush.

Mama: My know-it-all firstborn, you're so critical. Donny isn't educated like you, so what sort of job do you think he can find? It's not that he's not smart. It's just that at school he got restless and easily distracted.

Me: Mama, Donny has been extorting money since kindergarten and by junior high school he was selling drugs. Papa was not educated and he earned an honest living.

Mama: Donny is not your Papa, may he rest in peace.

## Just Enough Words

Mama: Look, as Donny says, if he did not provide these services, someone else would. He is just a businessman.

Me: Maybe that's why his moniker is Donny the Dealer.

Mama (with a familiar sigh): Well, Donny the Dealer gives lots of money to needy families. And, God bless his soul, to the church.

Me: Maybe instead of calling him Donny the Dealer we should call him Robin Hood.

Mama: And tell me, my son the saint, when was the last time you gave any money to the church, or to any needy person?

Me: Now, Mama, you know all my money is tied up in my law practice. This new case is particularly crucial.

Me: Besides, his largesse is at the expense of others.

Mama: So he's like a banker or politician. Those people pull off crimes and worse all the time. So why are you being so critical of your brother?

Me: Because, unlike those people, he is a violent criminal. Think about the people Donny victimizes and whose lives he ruins, if not terminates!

Mama (with a slam of her fist on the dashboard): Stop this! You don't know if he has killed anyone. That's just gossip.

Mama: Anyway, Donny says it's his clients who are committing the crimes. He's just providing a service.

I roll my eyes.

Mama: You think you're such a wise guy who knows everything. Let me tell you what I know. I know that your brother loves me. Unlike you, each week he comes to visit me and brings me my favorite pastries.

Me: Aw, Mama. You know how busy I am with this big case. Besides, he probably stole the pastries.

## George Francis Reid

### SOME MONTHS LATER

Me: Thanks Donny. I owe you one.

Donny: Big Brother, you owe me more than just one. I saved your ass. You could have gone to jail. How could you be so stupid as to try bribing a witness for your client, especially that schmuck?

Me (resignedly): Because, I could not afford to lose this case. Besides, you should be the last person to lecture me about bending the law - a little.

Donny: Anyway, I fixed it with the law.

Me (sullenly): Anyway, at the expense of being repetitive, I owe you.

Donny: Yeah, well, the best way you can repay me is to start visiting Mama. Go at least once a week and take along some of her favorite pastries.

Me: Mama.... Right

# Melee at The Church

---

Fists were flying, kicks were exchanged, tapestries were felled, the pilgrims were shocked beyond belief and the police were exercising their extensive riot control experience. This time the melee occurred in front of the Edicule of the Tomb, located in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the site where Jesus is believed to be buried. Jesus must be turning in his grave, at the Edicule or elsewhere.

As usual, it was another not-very-Christian-like battle between the monks. This time it was the Greek Orthodox versus the Armenian clergymen. The scene was the Armenian celebration of the Feast of the Cross. The year was 2008, Anno Domini - Medieval Latin for “In the year of Our Lord”. The monks, adorned in their colorful black and blue (appropriate choice for what was about to happen) and red and gold robes were swinging and kicking their limbs both with fury and the intent to harm. Whatever happened to turning the other cheek?

Where to find this most important church in all of Christendom and the location of intra-faith brawling? The most common route amongst those touring the Old City of Jerusalem is via the Jaffa Gate, into the Armenian Quarter and onto David Street. The throngs of tourists will push you in an easterly direction past the stalls selling a myriad of goods, trinkets and souvenirs. Taking a left at Christian Quarter Street, past more shops selling more of the same, a right at St. Helena, a left just before the gated entrance to the Mosque of Omar (and its sign that reads “For Prayers Only”), and a right through the archway that reads “Holy Sepulchre” will place you at the square and the main entrance to the church. Crowds of people, most armed with cameras aimed at either the church and/or each other will lead you inside.

Upon entering the gigantic doors of the church, the first mass of people you will sight are congregated around the Stone of the Unction, where

## George Francis Reid

it is thought that Christ's body was anointed and wrapped after his death. At this low-lying rectangular slab of stone, you will find pilgrims kissing the stone or rubbing it with oil and a cloth. Often they will also rub the slab with religious artifacts and even common household items. These anointed souvenirs are destined to travel back home with them.

A left from the Stone and a right at the first pillar, housed under a magnificent sky-lit rotunda, resides the Edicule. It is a large stone structure once supported by scaffolding because the various christian groups could not agree on the repairs. The entrance to the tomb is flanked by tall candles supported by holders nearly as tall. It houses two chambers. The first is the Greek Orthodox Chapel of the Angel, which has an altar purported to contain a piece of the stone rolled away by angels during the Resurrection. The second, named the Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, contains the tomb. Both chapels are cramped, the second more fit for the diminutive, and dimly lit.

When not fighting, by custom the monks would supervise the multitudes of the faithful, or not, as they queued to wait their turn to enter the tomb. Eventually, in this instance patience is a virtue, a monk would supervise their entrance to and exit from this cavernous structure. Often the faithful would stay longer than allowed and the monk would use whatever means, polite or otherwise, to move the traffic along. But during this disgraceful Sunday's celebration, it was not the monks who were doing the policing, it was the Mishteret Yisrael, the Israeli civil police.

To learn more about this fight between the faithful you could read, listen or watch the news accounts from around the world. In it the Greek Orthodox monks would emphatically argue that they had the right to post a monk at the Edicule; this was their chapel. Equally emphatic, the Armenian clergy argued that this was their celebration. When the dust settled, it seemed to be a battle for territory. It was not the first.

To quell the conflicts in 1853, Sultan Abdülmecid issued a firman (sovereign's edict) that the "actual status quo (of the church) will be maintained," the status quo being the result of hundreds of years of fighting with staves and stones, spurred by politics and international intrigue. Sadly, the firman settled nothing.

On Easter eve in 1970, due to a disagreement concerning repairs to the Deir el-Sultan, (a monastery situated on the roof of the church), while the

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Copts were attending a service downstairs, the Ethiopian monks changed the locks on the doors of the monastery and moved into the building. Today both groups cohabit the building, which is still in a state of disrepair.

On a sultry summer day in 2002, the same two groups escalated their squabbles when a Coptic monk moved his chair from its “status quo” appointed position to a cooler shaded spot. Unfortunately, he was then situated closer to the Ethiopian Christian monks, who considered this a beligerent act. The ensuing brawl sent 11 of the participants to the hospital.

The battle of Palm Sunday in April 2008 began after a Greek Orthodox monk was bodily removed from a crowd of worshipers, shoved to the ground and kicked by Armenian monks. The ensuing fighting was not only amongst the various monks but included some of the worshipers. Arriving to restore order, the Mishteret Yisrael were pummeled with palm fronds, the weapon of choice on this Palm Sunday.

And so the reader returns to November of that same year and the battle of the Feast of the Cross.

The monks would have you believe that the battles are for rights to real estate. In reality, it is for authority and preeminence. What would Jesus think?

## Epilogue - Saladin's Solution

To this day, none of the Christian denominations control the magnificent main entrance to the church. In 1192, Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb (aka Saladin) judiciously gave that responsibility to the Muslim Nuseibeh family. A few centuries later the then Ottoman rulers entrusted the Joudeh Al-Goudia family to serve as custodians of its keys.

Ironically, trying to maintain the peace within the walls of this church is in the hands of the infidel Muslims and Jews. What would Jesus say?

## Ronnie Returns

---

Ronnie was out of jail and had returned to town with a sullen smile on his face. He had been locked up for kidnapping his, presumed, lover's three children. His presumed lover, Tess, was an alluring, paranoid schizophrenic. Her husband was the one who notified the police of the kidnapping. Ronnie returned to town, but without Tess and her children because Ronnie's wife had filed trumped-up criminal charges against Tess for aggravated assault.

This convoluted saga began with the happenstance of a local town boy and an out-of-town girl becoming neighbors. She was of wealth and her family had plonked her into the summer home to minimize their embarrassment. The alternative was an institution.

Ronnie was born, raised and destined to die in this isolated town where the only adventure in his limited life was his second marriage to a beautiful woman of mixed race.

The arrival of Tess, her three children, two dogs and incidental husband was the talk of the town. They made their presence known. They particularly became the focus of Ronnie's attention.

She was enticing, exotic, very vocal and, when lucid, entertaining. When less than lucid, she could be seen staggering the streets screaming, often obscenities, and was frequently found floating in the frigid waters of the lake near their home. Ronnie was smitten.

What with their close proximity, coupled with her nervous energy, restless children and roaming dogs, it was inevitable that they would meet. Because of her allure, it was also inevitable that he was soon in this foreign family's embrace. And, as Tess's husband was often absent, it was presumed that she and Ronnie had become lovers. Ronnie certainly behaved like he was in love. She continued to behave like a paranoid schizophrenic.



## Just Enough Words

Ronnie spent that summer more in their home than in his own. He could be seen playing with the children and chasing the dogs. What could not be seen at night was left to the town's imagination.

Summer ended, and with the children's return to school in warmer climes, and with much commotion, the family left. The town was relieved. Their stay had been noisy, disruptive and unwelcome. Ronnie was left lonely and desolate, but not for long.

As told before, to prevent Tess's return to town, Ronnie's jilted wife had filed charges against the transient neighbor. So he bade his wife a brief farewell and, in his trusty truck, he followed Tess and her family south. The stage was set. The town was eager to know Ronnie's fate.

South of town, the departed family now included Ronnie. They all assumed their abnormal routines. The husband was absent, the children were hyperactive, the dogs roamed and Tess, when not medicated, was crazed - although no longer floating in the lake of the north.

It was not much later that Ronnie faced a dilemma. While he adored Tess and her children, back north his business was collapsing and his debts mounting. He pleaded with her to return with him, but, knowing her predicament with the law up north, she refused.

Ronnie needed to return north. He also needed Tess and her children. And so he needed a plan. He executed his plan when Tess was away to refill her many prescriptions. He herded the children into his trusty truck and told them they were bound for an amusement park further south. But, Ronnie headed north, back home, hoping that Tess would follow.

Instead, the itinerant husband returned to find Tess in tears and the children gone. And, as the attentive reader knows, the husband called the police. An Amber Alert was sounded and soon thereafter the children were home and Ronnie was in skookum house.

Ronnie remorsefully gave his excuses to the court. Tess and her children pleaded mercy from the court. The court, despite the husband's protest, instead of incarceration, warned Ronnie never to return.

Back in his trusty truck, Ronnie returned to his town with a sullen smile on his face. The court in the south would not let Ronnie return south. The court in the north would not let Tess, and by extension her children, return north. But love, presumed or otherwise, would find a way. Stay tuned.

# Faisal's Father

---

Faisal's father was of two minds. He was both content and conflicted. He had a thriving legal (divorce) practice. He had six children, three boys and three girls, now all adults. He also had a medical problem that could only be cured with the help of his enemy.

In a foreign land, the blood from one of his brethren, transfused during a routine surgical procedure, infected him with an insidious virus, Hepatitis B. Consequently, years later, he was in desperate need of a liver transplant. Fortunately, but ironically, circumstances offered him a chance to live.

Faisal's father lived in Jerusalem but, politically, he was a man without a country. He is a Palestinian. Following the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 (named the War of Independence by the Israelis, and the Catastrophe by the Arabs), he obtained a Jordanian passport, but not the rights of citizenship. Following the Six Day War of 1967 (or as the Arabs prefer, the War of 1967), he possessed an Israeli residence card, but no significant rights - save one.

As a "permanent" resident of Israel, Faisal's father's national health insurance program paid for all.

If he had been a resident of the Palestinian Autonomous Territory, he would have had no such insurance and would have had to rely on the largesse of the government's patronage to pay for the operation and subsequent treatment.

But the only compatible donor was a 51-year-old resident of Tel Aviv - and a Jew. A Jewish liver would give his Palestinian body life; they would chimerically and symbiotically co-exist. Could he live with such an arrangement?

Naturally, he decided to live. But as Nature would have it, his body and the new liver did not peacefully co-exist. Faisal's father's immune system

## **Just Enough Words**

wanted to destroy the foreign liver, even though destroying the liver, would mean destroying the body.

Fortunately, drugs, produced by Nature and provided by Israel's health insurance program, enabled the body and liver to co-exist.

If only there was only such a miraculous medicine to cure this conflicted land.

# The Jewess in My Gunsight

---

The year is 1942. I am in a field near Ivangorod, Ukraine, and I have the back of a fleeing Jewess in my gunsight. This moment began three years ago in Berlin. I had come to our capital seeking one of the many jobs our Führer was miraculously providing. Instead I found my life's calling.

I joined the Wehrmacht and despite my lack of an education was given the rank of Obersoldat. A year later, because of my allegiance to the party and unquestionable Aryan ancestry, I was reassigned to the Waffen-SS and promoted to the rank of Unterscharführer.

During the next year, books, pamphlets, posters, newspapers, radio broadcasts and movies convinced me that the Jews were the cause of so much of the world's evils and that the only solution to the problem was for the swine to be exterminated. My commander suggested that, if I wanted to rid the world of this vermin, I should join the Einsatzgruppe. I eagerly volunteered and was ordered to appear at the Border Police School in Pretsch.

With the coming of Operation Barbarossa, I was assigned to Group C under the command of SS-Standartenführer Dr. Emil Otto Rasch. Our orders, from Reichsführer Himmler himself, were to follow our armies into conquered lands and annihilate the Jews. And others.

In June of 1941, we 700 men were attached to Army Group South and trailed its invasion into southern and central Ukraine. From there it would be on to a rapid victory over the Soviets.

In the invasion's wake, we began exterminating the Jews. As we were always understaffed for such a glorious, but laborious, assignment, we were instructed to recruit the assistance of the locals, police and civilian, who were only eager to collaborate in ridding their country of this pestilence.

We searched everywhere for the Jews. They hid in buildings, sewers, cemeteries, forests, rivers and more. I must admit they are quick-witted

## Just Enough Words

people. But we knew where rats can hide. We spared no one. Old, young, men and women were eradicated daily.

And now, my rifle at the ready, I am at this field in Ivangorod. Along with me are two comrades and a photographer from the War Office to document our work.

Grasping the child to her chest, the Jewess is hopelessly fleeing from my gunsight. Further away there is another group of Jews who are also trying to run away. Although my comrades are shooting at them, I redirect my rifle to help kill them off first.

Meanwhile, the Jewess has stumbled to the ground with the child underneath. As I approach she is sobbing and breathing hard. Although we have been ordered to limit our ammunition, I slowly and deliberately fire two rounds between her shoulders and a third to her head. I kick her over and, as I had been ordered, made certain that both the woman and child are dead. Two less to plague the world.

We continue our assignment for nearly another two years. Then, because of our strategic retreat from the advancing Red Army, the Einsatzgruppen is demobilized. Most of my comrades are transferred to the Wafen-SS. I am allowed to carry on my duties at the Majdanek extermination camp.

As the dogged Red Army continues to advance, we hastily kill as many Jews as possible, destroy as much evidence as possible, gather our loot and flee the camp.

I hear that there were radio broadcasts from Berlin that “Werwolf” units for future guerrilla warfare are being formed. There are rumors that some of the former members of the Einsatzgruppen will to be reassigned to this elite commando force. But they are just rumors.

By winter of 1945, the war takes a turn for the worse and, to avoid capture, I tragically shed my uniform and find my way back to a Germany in defeat, ruin and desolation.

I know there will be trials. I know that there will be revenge. But I am trapped between the Russians from the east and the Americans and British from the west. There is no escape.

## George Francis Reid

Too many years later

An exhibit of the supposed “Holocaust” came to the small Canadian town (it reminds me of Ivangorod) where I live. I could not resist the temptation to attend and was pleased to see a prominently displayed photo of me seemingly pointing my rifle at the fleeing woman holding a child. Fortunately, my face could not be recognized.

The caption under the photo read “Ukraine 1942: Holocaust photo of German soldier shooting a Jewish woman and her young child.” The caption was wrong. The photo had been deliberately cropped so that the other soldiers and Jews were not seen.

At the time this photo was taken, my comrades and I, were really shooting these other Jews located further away. As you know, it was not until moments later that I executed the woman and child. I wanted to turn to the women next to me and tell her that this photo was a historical deception. In fact, the entire show was a historical deception.

It was intended to remind us that this was a “horrible period” and that its “root causes still exist.” I absolutely agree. It is horrible that we lost the war and that the Führer and all of my fallen comrades died in vain. And the cause for it all, the Jews, still exist. But there is nothing this old man can do about this infestation of the world. I leave that mission to future generations.

Heil Hitler!

# You're in the Army Now

---

Let's name him George, after the venerable creator of the comic strip and comic book character Sad Sack, Sergeant George Baker. George received one of the highest scores on both the Armed Forces Qualification Test and the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery - then failed the drug test.

He had convinced himself and others that the military was his best option to eventually affording a college education and the road to a better life. When asked why he did not simply apply for one of the many easily obtainable college loans, he explained that he had already dropped out of school four times and had not repaid any of his student loans; not to mention any of his other outstanding financial obligations. He reckoned that his options and prospects were reduced to one, the United States Armed Services - and especially their sign-on bonus.

Before, during and after he transiently attended colleges, George had earned some gray market money driving a taxi cab. Otherwise his time was whiled away playing sports, watching television, reading, cruising his computer, day dreaming, impregnating his girlfriends, moving from dwelling to dwelling - and taking drugs.

It was an existence that left him feeling conflicted and guilty, about the life he lived and the one he wanted. Despite his sundry activities, George considered his emotional daily routine to be a mixture of boredom, anger and mental self-flagellation. His occasional phone calls to his parents for consolation would inevitably end with his weeping to his mother and feeling his father's intimidation.

His desperate times called for desperate measures and so he convinced himself that joining the Armed Services was to be more than some cash and a means to an education. It was to be an adventure.

With a newfound sense of confidence in his future, George visited the recruiters representing all the branches of the Armed Services and selected

## George Francis Reid

the Army - they offered the “best deal.” The Army recruiter, rank, Sergeant First Class, was astounded by George’s test scores and not the least surprised with the ultimate results of the drug test. All further substantive discussions about his future in the Army were suspended until he passed a drug test.

George was mystified about why he had failed the drug test; it had been a month since he had taken anything. His recruiter, from long experience with applicants failing such tests, unofficially told George that often it took longer for the drug to clear the body and to return for testing in another month. To assist in that effort George surfed the Internet and followed some of the urban lore, including drinking copious amounts of fluids, losing weight, exercise (including sex) and ingesting a charcoal tablet the night before a test. Three months and three tests later, he finally passed. It was time to negotiate with his recruiter.

He wanted his job training assignment, Military Occupation Specialties (MOS), to be for a non-violent position offering the maximum amount of bonus money. Unfortunately, because of his drug history, he was ineligible for any positions where he would be considered a security risk, such as intelligence - despite his intelligence. Among his limited choices, George selected a speciality that was most likely to keep him out of harm’s way and paid well. With that he was ready to be processed.

The Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) assists all branches of the Armed Services and determines if those who are willing are also able. Regardless of gender, the demeanor among the recruits was machismo; rarely was fear or nervousness on display.

For two days, George was given many orders, including peeing in a cup. He was also poked, prodded, weighed, measured and asked ump-teen questions. He either signed or initialed the Enlistment/Reenlistment Document Armed Forces of the United States (three pages), the Statement For Enlistment (seven pages) and the Montgomery GI Bill Act of 1984 (three pages).

After that George and the others raised their right hands and took an oath that they would support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic....et cetera. Along with



## Just Enough Words

George, many were sent home with the generic words “Congratulations, Private E-1, you’re in the Army now.”

With time before being called-up, George returned to his most current dwelling and immediately phoned his parents. They effusively praised him on his achievement and told him how proud they were that he showed the initiative, will and determination to complete a goal. He could be proud of himself.

With the remainder of his time, George bid goodbye to his girlfriends, stored away what few possessions he owned and trained every day with calisthenics, running and weight lifting. And abstained from drugs. He was ready for any challenge the Army could throw at him.

The Army’s first pitch is always Basic Combat Training (BCT), spanning nine weeks, in three phases, Red, White and Blue. George’s BCT journey started with an overnight stay in a contract hotel and a prepaid one-way flight to a stateside southern fort.

With his feet firmly planted in Boot Camp, soon came the mail to George’s parents’. He wrote that all was well and that he was one of the oldest recruits and, as such, regarded himself as both wiser and more mature than the others. Also in the mail was an Army-issued post card with a hand-written “Momma” on the top, his scribbled signature on the bottom and, in-between, printed information about his location and that there would be more to follow. The Army also sent a five-page “Dear Parents, Family and Friends” letter that contained information regarding, among other things, sending money, Absence Without Leave (AWOL) emergencies and arrangements for the Graduation Ceremony, an event his parents proudly planned to attend.

After searching the relevant Internet web sites, George’s parents learned that, during his training, he would rise at 5 A.M. (First Call, 0500 hours) and go to sleep at 9:30 P.M. (Lights Out, 2130). Between those times, in the first week, he would meet his drill sergeant; be assigned to a platoon; participate in drill & ceremony training, sometimes with a rubber duck (fake rifle); learn the seven “Army Core Values” (loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage); and attend classes pertaining to issues about daily army life, such as race relations and sexual harassment.

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The second week promised to be more adventurous. It included learning ground fighting techniques, navigating through the compass course, maneuvering through the Victory Tower and the Teamwork Development Course and, tellingly, receiving Combat Lifesaver training.

His parents also read that an essential goal of the training was to instill self-discipline. Accordingly, the recruits were subjected to strict daily schedules that included many duties and high expectations. Most of them found this routine trying - especially George.

So it was of little surprise that, after receiving, in rapid succession, the next series of letters from George, his parents came to realize that this was all the training he would be given. In the first letter, he wrote that the conditioning was more rigorous and strenuous than he had anticipated. And, that he feared that he would not pass his chosen MOS, which apparently had a notoriously high attrition rate. Consequently, he would lose his bonus and, worse, he would be assigned to combat duty and put in the line of fire.

In the next correspondence he wrote that some of the orientation films were horrifyingly graphic, displaying the death and disfigurement of people, military and non-military alike, including women and children - collateral damage. He was shocked that being in the Army could be so violent. Shortly thereafter, in his final letter, he wrote that he had decided that he could not kill anyone and needed to leave the Army. He had seen the camp psychiatrist and, pending further action, he has been ordered to stay in his barracks.

The next day they received a sobbing voice mail message from George imploring them to contact his captain and convince him that their son's joining the army was a mistake and that he desperately needed to be discharged. They placed no such call and there was no further communication from George, for many weeks.

Was he still in his barracks? Had he been discharged?? Had he gone AWOL???

Then, a disembodied and unapologetic telephonic voice said, "Hi, Momma." He casually told about his Entry Level Separation (ELS) discharge, his shipment back to his point of origin and his re-adjustment to civilian life.

## **Just Enough Words**

And that is the sad story of former Private E-1 George's brief and lamentable time in the army. Now, he occasionally drives a taxi cab, soliciting suggestions from his passengers as to what kind of high-paying jobs are available that require a minimal amount of education and effort. The remainder of his time is spent selling drugs, both illicit and licit for illicit purposes (a full service provider), taking drugs - must "sample" the product - impregnating his girlfriends and constantly moving from dwelling to dwelling, but this time hauling along a 150-pound safe. Don't ask.

# The Deity Detector

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It's hard to believe, but there seems to be a test to detect nearly anything. We can detect things ranging from subatomic particles to distant planets. We even have the means to detect alien life forms. We think. With all the sophisticated and expensive devices humanity has created, we ought to have one to detect God - a Godometer.

The magnitude and market of such a device would be .... almost beyond belief. At last humanity would know if natural and unnatural phenomena, be they global, local, personal or otherwise, can be attributed to God, or not.

Most likely God has been worshipped since the dawn of humanity. God has many names: the Lord, the Almighty, the Creator, the Great Spirit, Gitchi Manitou and the Man Upstairs, just to give a few. Yet strangely, there is no scientific means to detect something that is of such importance to billions of people.

We have spent vast sums of money on scientific research. Some has merited a Nobel Prize, others the Golden Fleece Award. Perhaps it is time to devote a portion of that money to developing a device to detect God.

There are some essential elements that such a detector would need to include.

First and foremost, a definition of God would have to be created. Without such a definition, we would not know what we were detecting.

In order to define God and create a standard for testing, an international gathering of theologians of all religions, philosophers, politicians and other qualified participants would have to be convened. With that definition, a standard could be created and used to be assured that all detection devices were measuring the same God. The acronym for such an endeavor can be G.O.D.S. - God Only Definition and Standard

## Just Enough Words

Defined by specifications of the committee above, another committee composed of engineers and scientists would then be assembled to design and develop the detector. Such a device can be named G.O.D. - God Only Detector.

The test would have to be specific for God. Nothing ungodly can be detected by the tests. It would also have to be sufficiently sensitive to detect even the most minor acts of God.

Finally, the test must be reproducible such that every time the standard is used in the test God is detected. And the device must also be reliable. It must work every time so as not to miss any opportunity to ascertain the presence of God.

So, leaders of our world, unite under this common cause. Let us find the resources to use our (God given?) intellect and skills to create a Godometer, meeting the G.O.D.S and G.O.D. criteria, which will bring us a superior understanding, tolerance and appreciation for our world and the universe in which we exist.

# Storehouse Village

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Absent the sheet metal walls, sliding vertical accordion doors, overhead fluorescent lighting, sprinkler system, piped music and institutional linoleum and carpeted flooring, the building has all the appearances of a modestly priced condominium. Instead, Storehouse Village is “home” to those in need of more space. For a mutually satisfactory monthly fee, the landlord supplies the renters with room for more than just storage.

Situated at the intersection of its city’s commercial and residential districts, this self storage building stands three stories tall. It has 1,347 units of various dimensions. The smallest is the size of a large closet and the largest of a small apartment. It also has ample parking, spacious elevators, an intercom system, surveillance cameras and is neat, clean, temperature controlled and secure.

Outside the Village walls, during all hours of the day and night, can be seen the frequent deliverers of fast foods, packages and other things of various sizes, shapes and weights. Within its walls, beyond storing surplus stuff, the renters utilize the space for purposes that might be unfeasible, impractical or otherwise impossible elsewhere. Let’s go sneak a peek at some of those people in their units:

In Unit 852 can be found an elderly man staring, from the vantage of his storage trunk seat, at his possessions from the past: photos, diplomas, certificates and yellowing newspaper clippings. In his unit are 64 years of memorabilia to reminisce upon. His had been a life of travel, adventure and responsibility - in the service of the Navy and his country. Now there is only his share of a room at the local veteran’s home and this unit. He prefers the latter. It was just slightly smaller than the size of his last ship’s stateroom.

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## Just Enough Words

Most evenings and weekends, a group of the young and fit can be found in Unit 110 running, lifting, pushing, pulling, sweating and panting. From the color-coordinated fashionable to thread-bare rags, the exercisers sport all manner of dress.

They pooled their monies so that they could have this special private mini-gym where friends could socially, but seriously, train together. Despite the scent of sweat, laughter can be heard and smiles seen.

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The couple in Unit 1207 named it “The Hideaway.” “Their song” was a twist to the one once popularized by Chubby Checker, sung to the lyrics “let’s tryst again.”

They always worried that their extramarital activities would be discovered. Then again, they would decide to follow the advice that Chubby offered on the B-side of the same record.....

They have decorated The Haven (it was certainly cheaper and less risky than a motel room) with a queen-sized bed and two end tables, each with a lamp (his of the “lava” style, hers mounted over a photo of Chubby). They silently made whoopee.

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Stored in nondescript boxes, the wily renter in Unit 740 conceals collectible rare coins, stamps, artwork, jewelry, wines and musical instruments. An investment banker by profession, his stash is a hedge against the downfalls of stocks, bonds and supposedly more sophisticated investments. And, because Storehouse Village is not located in any of the world’s many tax havens, this treasure chest will undoubtedly go unreported to anyone - including his loved ones.

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Rather than storing rare collectibles, the enterprising tenant in Unit 741 deals in consumables. Inside a large but otherwise ordinary shipping box is a 6.4-cubic-foot, 300-pound, 100% steel body fire & burglary safe.

## George Francis Reid

For his clients' recreation, concealed inside the safe are packages of all types of "natural" and synthetic illegal drugs. Revenues and profits have been tremendous.

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What hangs from the walls in Unit 256 would make most people goggle, if not ogle and then blush. The artist, Ivy League-educated (BFA) former marine and current international consultant to the rich and famous, describes her works as "explicit, exotic erotica." Her secret studio is effectively lit and, for the sake of the models, comfortably heated.

As none of her family, friends, colleagues and clients would appreciate her artistry, she sells the much sought-after masterpieces under the nom de brush of Beatrix. To her pride and astonishment, her paintings can be found in homes, offices, galleries and the occasional museum - but not Unit 740.

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No storage facility would be complete without at least one renter whose unit is stuffed with excess household goods. At Storehouse Village, Unit 424 is the quintessential example. The space is rented to a family of five - no additions expected. Their home, including the basement, attic, storage shed and three-car garage (the cars are parked on the driveway), are filled, beyond capacity, with a superabundance of toys, clothing, furniture, appliances, books, files, knickknacks, motorcycles, scooters, wagons (and many other means of transportation), tools, implements and more toys - just to name a few of the more essential items.

The amount of stuff in their unit defies the mathematical laws for the maximum utilization of space. Unfortunately, despite all their ingenuity, they have not devised a means to easily retrieve items from the bottom of the back of their space.

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## Just Enough Words

Storehouse Village is also a haven for musicians, soloists and ensembles alike. They practice and play a wide range of styles and genres. Prudently, the building's manager locates the musicians' respective units out of ear-shot of one another and from others who frequent their rooms for long durations of peace and quiet. Our tour continues with a few examples of these practitioners.

The "Genreations" practice their punk/heavy metal/folk/rock music in Unit 310. The music has been variously described as *unconventional*, *outlandish*, *bizarre*, *loud*, and *offbeat*. The musicians have been variously described as *savages*, *overaged*, *tone deaf*, *deaf*, *far out*, and *anti-musicians*. All agree that they should not give up their day jobs as physician, lawyer, accountant, yoga teacher and postal worker. They have yet to be engaged for a gig.

On a weekly basis, in Unit 611, can be found four instruments, each having four strings. This quartet is composed of two violins, one viola and a cello. The quartet prefers the music of the Bs - Bach, Barber, Beethoven, Berg, Boccherini, Borodin, Boulez, Brahms, Bruch, and Bruckner, and sometimes the lesser appreciated Berio, Bliss and Bloch. Tenants and non-tenants alike gather to listen to them play - even those of the other long-haired variety.

A Singling Bowl sends its otherworldly sound floating out of Unit 556. Its Nepalese owner strikes or rubs the bell with a leather mallet to produce an enchanting combination of fundamental and harmonic tones that has been an instrumental source of musical pleasure and meditation for hundreds of years. Sometimes she will be accompanied by a percussive panoply of gongs, cymbals, or even a steel pan. The "Genreations" of Unit 310 have offered to join in - but have been graciously declined.

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Thanks to management, a large community board stands inside Storehouse Village's lobby. On it, in addition to postings of items for sale, or sometimes lost, can be found a community calendar. Listed on it are announcements for upcoming musical and artistic events along with the unit number location. Also included are social gatherings.

## **George Francis Reid**

At such gatherings, renters will greet each other and identify themselves by their unit number. Life within their units is the main topic of conversation. All agree that Storehouse Village has added a dimension to their lives.

Thus ends our tour. So, next time you find yourself alongside such a building, think of it as more than just a self-storage facility. Think of it as a “community” of yellowing newspaper clippings, barbells, lava lamps, rare stamps, drugs, erotic artworks, toys, guitars, violins, a Singing Bowl - and much more.

# Day of Atonement

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*Dear Jacobo: I thought you should have this note which I found amongst your father's possessions. I know you two were estranged, but I think he would want you to have it.*

*He was a wonderful man who, as a prominent oncologist, helped many patients and their families. He was also a valuable member of our synagogue and, when he was its President, I enjoyed having him sit by my side during services.*

*I hope that you and your family are enjoying life in Australia.*

*Be well, Rabbi Leiberman*

*2 April, 1998*

*P.S. I knew of his past but nevertheless supervised his conversion. I implore you to let the memory of what you are about to read rest in peace.*

September 27, 1944

Would the world be a better place if I were dead? It is a question I ask myself today, the Jews' holiday of Yom Kippur. It is to be a tradition that I will continue for as long as I live. I ask this question because of my experimentation on Jewish inmates. At this time each year, I will plead with God, and the people whose lives I sacrificed futilely trying to find a cure for cancer, to forgive me.

I could never have imagined that I would be placed in such a appalling position. I come from a good and devout German Christian family and a long line of physicians - all dedicated to healing humankind. I graduated

## George Francis Reid

with honors from medical school and with fervor declared the aphorism of those before me “Primum non nocere”.

Before the war, I had an aspiring career as a physician-scientist at a prominent hospital. The work was challenging and gratifying and I had earned the respect of my colleagues. Everything was in place to enjoy a long, productive and prosperous profession.

But the war cruelly changed my fate. To avoid conscription into the army, I joined the Mörder Klinik und Forschung Institut which treated the political and military elite and was also involved in medical research. In addition to treating patients, I was assigned to the group working on discovering anti-cancer drugs and, to my horror, given the responsibility for testing the “safety” of these experimental medicines on human subjects.

The experimental drugs are supplied by the chemical and pharmaceutical companies located in Germany and conquered countries. The human subjects come from the many concentration camps spread throughout Germany.

The subjects enter my office, accompanied by two guards. My orderlies then escort them back to my lab. They are ordered to remove their tattered uniforms - with their unmistakable yellow badges - and are then strapped to a gurney. Some scream, others shiver. Ignoring their anguish, I try to offer them some reassuring words.

I inject the test drug intravenously, watch them for a few hours and then send them away for two weeks. With their return, if they are alive, I examine them for any ill-effects and measure their blood pressure and heart rate. I then re-inject them with a more potent dose of the drug. This procedure is repeated until they inevitably die, most in excruciating pain and vocal agony. I then dissect them, inspect the vital organs and examine their tissues microscopically.

I have tried to experiment on as few subjects as possible, but there are so many chemicals to test. My superior informs me that none of the drugs have been efficacious but that we are required to continue.

I have learned about the disgusting experiments performed on children - in the name of science - by Josef Mengele at Auschwitz. It is the work of a madman. I try to keep my sanity by reasoning that my work could save millions, if not billions, of lives. Besides, I am told, the Jewish prisoners

## Just Enough Words

used in my experiments are destined for eventual extermination; instead, now, it might be for a good cause.

But then I wonder if I would be willing to risk my life if it might save the lives of many more. Sadly, in this instance, knowing that the chances that any of these experimental drugs might be effective is negligible, I would not make that ultimate sacrifice. But I would like to think that under different circumstances I would be prepared to be put to that test. In spite of all this moral posturing, I continue the deadly experiments.

I know that the war is not going well and that we will inevitably lose. When that bittersweet day arrives, I plan to submit myself and my lab notes to the Americans, not the Russians. I will accept their justice. I know that I am damned.

And so it is that, regardless of my fate, on each Yom Kippur, I will ask for forgiveness. May God have mercy on my soul.

# On Both Sides of the Law

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August 11, 2016

## Author's Notes

These notes pertain to my story "On Both Sides of the Law," which will appear in the September issue of The Bostonian magazine. They are based on my interviews with many people, including members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Department of Justice (DOJ), some congressmen and/or their aides, the District Attorney's office (DA) - all off the record - and most importantly, with Rufus Skel - on the record.

There are more than 4,000 federal crimes in this country and a multiple of that quantity of regulations that bring criminal penalties. Add that to the number of crimes and regulations legislated in other jurisdictions and the total amount becomes staggering. Even analysts at the Congressional Research Service cannot ascertain the precise number of separate offenses that are on the books.

Some shocking statistics: greater than 2.3 million people are incarcerated in the USA, about one in every 100 adults. As a proportion of its total population, America imprisons more people than Britain, Germany and Japan by a factor of five, nine and 14 times, respectively.

The jails are crammed, yet yearly the number of people who are imprisoned is increasing, particularly for non-violent crimes which sometimes should not be considered criminal acts. Oftentimes, these laws violate the concept of retributive justice, the idea that the punishment fit the crime.

One explanation for these trends is that no politician, particularly those seeking re-election, want to be viewed by his or her constituents as being soft on crime. So, politicians enact more anti-crime laws with more punitive, especially when mandatory, sentencing.

## Just Enough Words

Another explanation is the extensive lobbying efforts, on behalf of both the prison guard unions and the private prison industry, to some of those same politicians for both more severe and mandatory sentencing.

This is a story about U.S. Congressman Rufus (Red - because of his bright red hair) Skel, whose poll numbers were at a personal low and who was up for re-election in six months. But he knows that he represents a district that is pro-guns and harsh on crime, blue collar, white collar, violent, non-violent - all crime. So, given his tenuous circumstances, he decided to sponsor an egregious and odious bill.

If he had been a lawyer or even of greater intellect, he would have realized that it should be unlawful to enact such a law. Ironically, through his own stupidity, he was convicted of violating the “Skel Intent to Commit a Crime Victim Notification Act” (aka Skel Act). He was sentenced to the mandatory five years in a Federal Penitentiary.

### Interview With Rufus

I met with Rufus at the Federal Prison Camp in Duluth, Minnesota, which houses minimum security male offenders, on 5 August. It would be my one and only interview; he did not want to jeopardize his upcoming appeal. This is a transcript of our conversation:

Author (A): Good morning, Mr. Skel. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. How are you?

Skel (S): Good morning, Ed. Please call me Red and thank you for coming. I want you to know right here and now, I am innocent and, frankly, I do not know why I was convicted.

A: I thought we could begin by you telling me a little about your personal history. For example, Skel is an unusual name.

S: It is Dutch. It's short for something, but I can't remember what. You'll have to look it up.

My parents came to this great land of opportunity after World War Two. I was born in a small town and am as red-blooded an American as anyone.

## George Francis Reid

And, as I like to tell the voters, while I may not be the “sharpest knife in the drawer,” I know right from wrong and will speak their voice.

A: Interesting. Why did you decide to become a politician and how did you become a U.S. Congressman?

S: After high school, I became a barber in my daddy’s shop. Well, I got to know lots of the men in town and, before you know it, I was elected to the town council and then became mayor.

It was right about the time that my second term was about to end that people started to complain to me that they were sick and tired of all the horse droppings in town, particularly near restaurants. I twisted the arms of the council into passing an ordinance that prohibited such things.

Now you might find that a silly law, but I hear that owners of horses in one particular town cannot ride them at night without tail lights. Now that is a silly law.

Anyhow, word got out about the law and I became real popular. At about the same time, Congressman Royal Stanlee decided not to run for re-election and a bunch of guys from the state party came to see me and asked if I was interested in the job. Well, I had never been above the Mason-Dixon Line before, let alone lived there, but if I could be of service to the people, so be it.

My campaign slogan was “No more manure.” I won by a landslide and me and the missus left for Washington.

A: How did you think up the Skel Act?

S: As I recollect, I had heard that it was a state law somewhere and I thought it was a darn good idea. So, if it’s good enough for that state, then it’s good enough for all the states.

A: Did you verify that there was such a state law on the books?

S: (after a long pause and staring at the ceiling) No.

A: My sources tell me that you wanted to originate a bill in the House, with your name attached, that would bring



## Just Enough Words

you to the nation's attention because you had ambitions of becoming a senator or the president.

S: I will do for my country whatever it asks of me.

A: Some lawmakers argued that the law you wrote, although unlikely, might irrationally motivate some people, who otherwise had changed their minds about committing the intended crime, to proceed anyway for fear of being convicted of violating the Skel Act. Sure, the penalties for committing the crime are more severe than under your act, but don't you think that this law presents them with a Catch-22 situation and may inadvertently increase the number of crimes committed?

S: Don't be ridiculous, the law we passed does no such thing. It was approved by a majority of the members of both the House and the Senate, on both sides of the aisle. Do you think that we are that stupid?

A: Well, an election was months away and you and most of your colleagues were up for re-election and in jeopardy of losing your races. Is it not possible that you and they thought that being "tough" on crime would favorably tip the balance of the election? For example, you were certainly down in the polls.

S: We would never put our own political ambitions above our constitutional duties to our constituents. What do you take us for?

A: According to your campaign finance records, you have received tens of thousands of dollars from various prison guard unions and private prison corporations. Did their support have any bearing on your position about your crime legislation?

S: I have many supporters and they all have every right to exercise the First Amendment.

## George Francis Reid

A: Returning to the subject of your colleagues, my sources also tell me that, after you were arrested, some of those same colleagues considered holding a congressional hearing into your alleged criminal activities.

S: But they didn't. They probably thought that it would be a waste of the taxpayers' money.

A: Other sources tell me that what first brought you to the attention of the FBI was an alert from the NSA. Apparently, as a part of a routine monitoring of all government officials' Internet traffic, they noticed that you were seeking information about how to make a poison. After following your activities and realizing your intent, the FBI turned the matter over to the DOJ. They, in discussions with the state and local authorities, concluded that there was insufficient evidence to arrest you for attempted murder but, ironically, they did have enough evidence to take to a grand jury for violation of the Skel Act.

S: Firstly, the NSA shouldn't have given that information to the FBI.

A: Obviously the trial judge disagreed and in her ruling cited the relevant Federal Law.

S: Secondly, as we showed in court, the FBI was out to get me because I gave Director Braxton a tough time during a congressional hearing and voted to reduce their budget. They pressured the DOJ into filing charges against me. And then the DOJ assigned a prosecutor with political ambitions who wanted to make his name by putting me in jail.

A: Let's talk about US District Attorney Halbert Edgington for a moment. I know you proclaim your innocence, but did you ever try to plea bargain with him?

S: Yea, my attorney convinced me that we might lose this case, so we should at least hear what they had to offer. But it was clear to me that, for his own political gain, the D.A.

## Just Enough Words

wanted me convicted and to serve the mandatory sentence. I mean why else would the guy hold a press conference and tell everyone that the evidence was “incontrovertible” and that I was caught “red handed”?

A: I have also heard that, knowing that this would be a very expensive trial and that you did not have a legal defense fund, your attorney, a nationally prominent criminal defense lawyer, offered to represent you in exchange for all book and movie rights. Did you accept his offer?

S: That is a private matter.

A: And speaking of press conferences, after the law was passed you gave a press conference and appeared on many radio and television talk shows to extol the virtues of the new law. You said, and I quote, “It would protect all of this great nation’s law abiding citizens.” Do you still think that is true?

S: Of course, it’s a great law. But in my case it was deliberately misrepresented by the D.A. and the jury bought his story.

A: So you are still convinced, despite everything that has happened to you, that in drafting and introducing this law you did not shoot yourself in the foot?

S: Damn straight.

A: Back to your press conference for a moment. At it you claimed that during your arrest, the FBI abused you, and that, if they were not a federal agency, you would have sued them. What happened that day?

S: I am glad you asked; it was shocking the way they treated me. I was at my home and, in broad daylight, in front of all my neighbors, the FBI and the local sheriff showed up in vans and cars. Heavily-armed, they pounded on my door and, when I opened it, five agents wearing flak jackets stormed the house.

## George Francis Reid

Well I was flabbergasted. I thought they must have the wrong house. They pressed me against the wall and frisked me for weapons. I told them that I was a United States congressman and that they have the wrong person and then they showed me the arrest warrant.

They pushed me into a chair and told me not to move. They tore my house apart, pulling out drawers, dumping papers on the floor and turning everything over. Then after about an hour of this, they carted off boxes of my stuff and my computer. They did the same thing in my apartment and office in D.C. This is not Soviet Russia, this is America.

A: Why did you want to murder Congressman Joe Earl Wilkins? You have been friends with him ever since you joined the House.

S: I don't want to talk about it. It was personal. But I got over it. I didn't commit any crime. I mean everybody, at some time or other, thinks about killing someone. Is that a crime?

A: Yes, according to the Skel Act, if you did not notify your victim of your intent. After all, you did go so far as to prepare the poison that you were going to give him during breakfast the next morning. So, even though you did not attempt to kill Wilkins, according to a jury of your peers, you violated the Skel Act.

S: (after a long pause) You said it yourself. I didn't try to kill him. I got rid of the poison instead of Joe Earl. I didn't do anything wrong.

A: Do you have anything to say to the other people who have been convicted of your law?

S: Now wait a minute. Let's get something straight. Sure, I drafted and introduced this law and it has my name on it, but it is not my law; it's the people's law. But to answer your question, if they think they were unjustly convicted, just one word, appeal.

## Just Enough Words

A: Well thank you very much for your time and candor, Red. I am sure the readers will be very interested in knowing about your side of the story.

S: Thank you Ed. Unlike your colleagues who have besmirched my good name, I am sure that you will write the truth. You tell your readers that I will soon be out of jail and I look forward to returning to Congress and serving my voters and my country.

### Author's Notes:

Perhaps Rufus Skel's conviction of the Skel Act will be reversed on appeal. Or, knowing our lame duck president's political proclivities, Skel will be pardoned. If for nothing else, maybe Skel should be found guilty of mindlessly sponsoring such an asinine law.

But it is important for the reader to appreciate that, perhaps in an over-zealous effort to protect citizens, our lawmakers have enacted some, and I shall be kind, imperfect anti-crime laws. Consequently, Rufus Skel is just one of perhaps hundreds or more of people who have fallen victim to similarly senseless laws that should be illegal. There should be some justice.

Conceivably justice can best be served, with just a hint of irony, if the Skel Act and Rufus Skel's subsequent sad story serve as a deterrent against the passage of similarly injudicious anti-crime laws. Possibly, we need an omnibus Anti-Skel Anti-crime Law.

# Zoey's Dilemma

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The date is in the foreseeable future. In a private suite of a top-ranked hospital, Zoey is near death.

From her bed, Zoey reminisces about the good life she has lived. Uppermost are the donations, a sizable portion of her inheritance, that she has made to good causes. There was never a shortage of such causes.

She thought she had led an ethical life, particularly in the treatment of animals. Zoey lived a life opposed to the taking of others. She had been a vegetarian since she was old enough to make her own decisions. Later she learned that, like animals, plants are also sophisticated, sentient beings. But she reckoned she had to eat something.

Zoey's pet peeve is animal experimentation. Her financial portfolio does not include companies that mistreat her fellow beings. As an activist, she protested against their cruel treatment and ultimate sacrifice. For the cause, she bared her breasts - sometimes. Along with her co-conspirators, she stole animals from laboratories and brushed bogus blood on scientists' doorsteps.

Like many other humans, Zoey's lifestyle ultimately led to a hospital room and her dilemma. Her heart is failing and without another she will soon be dead. Unfortunately, because there are so many others desperately waiting for the same, a timely replacement is near impossible. Unless it is from a pig.

She is of two minds about her dilemma. Her friends, relatives and co-conspirators plead with her to take another life for her own. Zoey considers such an act as something akin to a primitive sacrificial rite. But time is not on her side and a decision must be made.

Zoey makes a decision. She wants to visit the donor pigs. With an oxygen tank in tow, they load her into an ambulance and drive her to

## Just Enough Words

Transzenopharm Corporation's Animal Donor Facility. This is not a typical pig farm. No sties to be seen.

Instead, the facility is immaculately clean. The pigs, born and raised on site, are well nourished and in the pink of health. Their weights and vital statistics are documented daily. They bask in full spectrum lighting and lounge on sterile wood chips. They grunt with contentment.

Zoey removes her oxygen mask, is helped off her gurney and slowly walks into the private room of one of the pigs. The two cautiously approach each other. Both give each other a sniff. They rub against each other. They communicate with each other. Zoey hugs the animal. Human and porcine bond.

Knowing that, if not for her, the pig will die for another, Zoey leaves the room sobbing. It is a long, silent, emotional ride back on the gurney, in the ambulance and to her hospital room.

Finally time takes its toll. Zoey's breathing is beyond labored. Her complexion has become a deeper blue. Her vitals indicate that death is approaching.

But it is not death that knocks on her door. After a polite pause, her physician walks into her room. Wearing a cautious smile, he sits next to her on the bed, holds her hand and tells her that it is time for her decision.

Breathlessly, Zoey whispers.....

# Symbiotic Cities

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Ironically, it was the sighting of the nuclear missiles that eventually brought about a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Israelis named the solution *מִירָע יִנְפוּתָשׁ*, the Palestinians *ندملا ةيلفالكثلا* and others Symbiotic Cities. Regardless of the name, the missiles were deemed by some as a godsend.

The international inspectors had assured the world that the Islamic Republic of Iran did not have such nuclear armaments. Nor did anyone believe the announcement in the Al Alam News. But there they were, easy to detect Shahab and Sajil missiles, topped with uranium or plutonium payloads. There was not a military satellite camera passing over Persia that did not document their existence.

The discovery of the armed missiles brought panic and political chaos to Israel. An emergency meeting of the government's center-right cabinet, all 40 members, and the leaderships of the Israeli Defense Force and the intelligence community was convened. After some animated and stormy arguments, with consternation, it was concluded that any pre-emptive attack on Iran would be suicidal and that, despite recent news accounts, the Arrow missile defense system realistically left the nation defenseless. This desperate situation required drastic action.

During a moment of calm, the Prime Minister, a politician of hawkish persuasion, wondered aloud if the nuclear fallout from Iranian bombs could also extensively damage the Palestinian Territories and thus serve as a deterrent. The military response, given the size of the payload, was in the negative. Then in a moment of divine counter-intuition and policy, the leader of the Ultranationalist/Ultra-Orthodox Brotherhood suggested that the Palestinians be encouraged to relocate next to areas inhabited by major Israeli populations - as human shields.



## Just Enough Words

He reasoned that the Iranians would not dare bomb these areas because of the collateral damage to their Palestinian proxies and co-religionists. Furthermore, it would be a win-win situation for Israelis and Palestinians alike. The Israelis would be protected and also have access to a skilled, but inexpensive, labor force. There would no longer be a need to import labor from distant lands.

The Palestinians would have access to jobs and the opportunity to create prosperous communities that were not exploited by the kleptocratic Palestinian National Authority. They would be self-governed city states that could collect taxes, offer better schools and healthcare and, armed only with small weapons, policing.

Of course there would have to be guarded security walls surrounding these Symbiotic Cities, but they would be unobtrusive and eye pleasing. Subject to inspections and the issuance of passes, citizens, known as Symbionts, would be free to travel to other such cities and the Palestinian Territories.

Citizens of these cities would be free to establish their own businesses, including exporting. As an added incentive, these cities would be provided all utilities at deeply discounted prices.

A vote of the cabinet was immediate and unanimously in the affirmative. With the sounding of the bell and the raising of hands, the Knesset's voted the same. Momentously, it was now alright for the Palestinians to return.

An "Offer to Return" media campaign was launched posthaste. Advertisements were announced on Palestinian radio, television, newspapers and web sites. The response was miraculous. Everyone who was not a beneficiary of Palestinian National Authority patronage was anxious to participate. There was a very long waiting list.

Almost as fast as the biblical world was created, boundaries were drawn, cities planned, security walls erected, Israelis moved out and Palestinians moved in. East Jerusalem and Jaffa became such cities. Others bordered Haifa, Rishon Lezion, Ashod and many more.

Some pundits were aghast with the arrangement, equating these Symbiotic Cities to nothing more than ghettos. But not the Symbionts. They regarded their new city-states as an oasis.

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Some of their governments were secular, others more religious. But they were all democratically elected. They visited Singapore, Monaco, even the Vatican, to better understand how to develop their cities. They also discussed forming a loose confederation amongst the various city states - but could never come to an agreement. Nevertheless each of them thrived.

Then one day the inevitable finally happened. Based on some contrived circumstances, Iran threatened to bomb Israel and warned the Symbionts to immediately evacuate; this was not saber rattling. Within hours, the Israeli Defense forces were mobilized, especially land-, sea- and air-based nuclear missiles. Sirens sounded and the civilians prepared for an atomic holocaust, their antiquated bomb shelters being useless against such attacks.

The United Nations Security Council met in emergency session. The United States and European Union declared that they were prepared to take all diplomatic and military measures necessary. The Arab League was inert - although, reminiscent of 1948, some of its same members warned the Symbionts to flee.

But this time they did not heed the warning and the Iranian missile silo doors closed.

Two days later, the Ayatollah announced that the threat to Israel had been unauthorized and was perpetrated by rogue elements committed to destabilizing his government. He also claimed to have incontrovertible proof that these elements were known to have received support from both the great and small Satan's.

Rogue Iranian heads rolled. The world sighed in relief. And, the Israelis, together with their new welcome neighbors, lived happily - and symbiotically - ever after.

## Code Silver

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His pants and shoes are spotted with blood from his fidgeting with that “damn needle.” Geoff hates needles. Too often they are used to withdraw his blood. This one infuses someone else’s. He undergoes this tedious, pain-in-the-arm transfusion weekly because one of his maladies has rendered him anemic. The other robs him of the recollection that, with each passing week, he is becoming increasingly restless, anxious, cantankerous and unmanageable.

The staff try to distract this burly former marine by repeatedly giving him the same magazines to read. The neighboring patients attempt to engage him in conversation by asking him the same questions or telling him the same monotonous stories about their lives. All are at the end of their tethers. Geoff’s snaps first.

While the donor’s blood gradually pumps into his body and mixes with his own, Geoff suddenly rises from his reclining chair and vehemently cries out, “I don’t want this piece of steel in my arm. Take it out. I’m going home.” Florence, his nurse, calmly tries to coax him back into his chair. He resists; she persists. Then, with a rapidity he had not experienced for many years, Geoff pulls the needle from his vein and brings it to Florence’s throat.

Some of the patients begin to scream. Geoff, not comprehending why, becomes more anxious. The supervising nurse calls the hospital operator. Moments later a Code Silver is broadcasted, three times, throughout the hospital. The Infusion Center has a hostage situation.

The standoff commences with Geoff’s back to the wall and Florence’s back to Geoff. His left arm is draped around her shoulders, while his right hand menacingly holds the needle to her throat. From the needle, blood drips down Florence’s throat, staining her uniform.

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With the police and their negotiator yet to arrive, in front of this two-some are the supervising nurse, various hospital administrators and members of security - with tasers and guns discreetly unholstered.

Since their treatments must continue, the other patients push their mobile pumps along as they are ushered to a cordoned-off area behind a wall at the other end of the Infusion Center. Their monitors indicate that their blood pressures are abnormally high.

Having never experienced this code color, the more injudicious the words spoken to Geoff (e.g. How are you feeling? Can we get you anything? Your wife is on the way. Later: Relax. Let her go; she has never done anything to you.), the more confused and angry he becomes. He threatens to stab Florence "if you don't shut up."

But it is the words, "Let's not make the situation worse than it already is. If you put the needle down and let her go, you won't get into too much trouble." that compel Geoff to scratch Florence's throat with the needle. Her blood now mixes with the donor's. Tasers and guns are at the ready.

Suddenly Geoff's infusion pump sounds a heart-stopping alarm. The blood bag is empty. Seconds later the needle stops dripping blood. Florence calmly tells Geoff that his treatment is over and that he can now go home. Geoff slowly gazes at the bag, then the needle, and smiles. He releases Florence, rolls down his shirtsleeve, puts on his hat and coat and, with the crowd wisely parting from his path, walks out the door.

## Worse Than War

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Fighting in the jungles of Vietnam was a blast compared to living in this hell hole. In 'Nam, I welcomed the 'Cong's constant attacks and tolerated our military commanders' incompetency, but no one should have to suffer being situated in this godforsaken "Home." I am only 67 years old, but because of my disease and poverty, I have no choice but to live in a place where the average age is 85 and almost everybody is either senile, decrepit, or both. I want out - now.

The Lord moves in mysterious ways and I was certainly one of his lost sheep. When I was a kid, I took pleasure in teasing and fighting the other boys in my neighborhood and at school. As I grew older, I added the passions of the girls to my list of pleasures. But when my favorite girlfriend lost her life after I lost control of my speeding car, I joined the Marines and shipped to 'Nam to fight my new enemy.

After two tours of duty, I returned stateside and married long enough to father a son. Using the skills that Uncle Sam taught me, I earned a living providing "services" for the wrong side of the law. I abused myself with alcohol and drugs and my new enemies with knives and worse.

Thankfully, God finally set my sins aside and told me to spread the word by pastoring a church. My flock was small but devoted; I had a mission and a following. But now I bring his teachings to my co-residents of this Home. Despite the protests of the Nazis who run this place, I religiously tend to my new flock. And while I love my flock, the only thing I have in common with them is our imprisonment and infirm state of being. God help me.

Because of my disease, normally easy tasks, such as bathing or even buttoning or unbuttoning my clothing, unassisted, are beyond my capability. Oftentimes I feel as helpless as a baby. Except when I have to use my cane.

## George Francis Reid

For instance, one night a deranged resident went on a rampage. Screaming and cursing blasphemous words, he entered people's rooms and pushed over their furniture. The Nazis just watched, so I ordered him to stop and, when he didn't, I brought him to the floor with one swift pull of my cane handle behind his ankle. For that brief moment, I felt young again.

I yearn for the war years and the camaraderie I shared with my troops. The power of our exploits and the "rush" we felt after the kill was intoxicating. At the Home there are no such relationships and no such rush.

In 'Nam, I was a leader and we were comrades-in-arms. In this place, even with my godly proselytizing activities, I may as well be on a deserted island. I need out. I want my old life back. I want to go back to 'Nam.

My son promises me that, as soon as he gets back on his financial feet, I can move in with him, but I fear that I will never leave this place alive. Meanwhile, I just sit on my chair in the lounge, militarily erect and grasping my cane - weapon always at the ready. To keep up my morale, I fantasize about the better days to come. And come they did.

Miraculously, one brilliant sunny afternoon, I am strapped into my seat in the Home's van, destined for another mandatory mind-numbing tour of the town. As usual, the driver enters and asks, "And where would you like to go today?" as if we have a choice. With a beaming smile, I bring my M16 to my shoulder, squeeze the trigger and - while making a blasting sound - I shoot him. With the lord leading the way, my comrades and I commandeer the bus. Oorah, off we go, back to 'Nam!

# Lottery for Life

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For Linda Rehpaim, M.D. it was a time for both excitement and quandary. It was an exciting time to be a clinical researcher. As a neurologist at a major teaching hospital, she was involved in testing a new drug for the treatment of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease - and it was working.

The experimental drug was the first of the new generation of "targeted" drugs to be tested for this disease. And at last, years of methodical sleuthing and expensive experimentation seemed to be paying off.

For the first time patients were eating better, breathing better and had a chance of living longer. For someone who had been treating ALS patients for nearly 10 years and witnessing the tragic outcome of the disease, this sort of dramatic response brought a sense of satisfaction.

The quandary began shrouded as a medical mystery. It involved two ALS patients, identical twins, the Gemelle sisters, Dolly (born first) and Thea, who were participating in the testing of the new drug. Although the chances of being stricken by the disease is about 1 in 100,000 and there was no history of ALS in the family, tragically both of them became afflicted.

To scientifically determine the efficacy of the drug, a computer program was used to randomly select which patients were to receive the drug and which the placebo - a sophisticated lottery. As chance would have it, Dolly was assigned the drug and Thea the placebo control.

The clinical trial was also double-blinded; neither patients nor physician knew who received the drug and who did not. But because of the drug's dramatic results, it was obvious to the twins and Dr. Rehpaim that Dolly was improving and Thea was not.

About a month after this realization, Dr. Rehpaim also knew that Thea's symptoms were suddenly improving while Dolly's had begun to deteriorate. This sudden change in clinical status had not been seen with

## George Francis Reid

any of the other patients she had been testing. At first she was perplexed, then suspicious. After reviewing the results from the twins' most recent blood tests, her suspicions were confirmed; Dolly was sharing her drug with Thea.

The doctor was confronted with a dilemma that she could never have contemplated. To not notify her hospital authorities and the pharmaceutical company testing the drug about the twins' breach of protocol was unthinkable. But denying Thea the medication, knowing it would mean her certain deterioration, was unconscionable. Worse still, if the drug took too long to be approved it could mean her death. She could never allow that to happen.

Although she was trained not to become emotionally involved with her patients, with these twins it was near to impossible. They were all about the same age and had attended the same Ivy League school. This delightful pair were also at the pinnacle of their professions. Dolly was a prominent lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union and Thea was researcher with the World Wildlife Fund.

The night Dr. Rehpaum made her discovery about the twins, she opened the door to her home and was enthusiastically and lovingly received by her two young daughters and her husband bearing a glass of her favorite wine. Dinner was delicious and the discussion centered around the children's school and the husband's office. Later she kissed the children on their foreheads, her husband on the lips and told him not to wait up for her. She entered the study, turned on her computer and pressed fingers to keyboard.

Some time after the clinical testing was completed and the results were announced, an Ethics Briefing authored by Linda Rehpaum, M.D. appeared in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*. In the extract she wrote:

"As part of a placebo-controlled Phase III clinical trial to investigate the safety and efficacy of a drug for the treatment of Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), I enrolled two female twins'. Although the study was double-blinded, based on the dramatic efficacy of the drug, it became obvious which patients were receiving the drug. Based on the twins' sudden changes in clinical responses after this information became apparent, I suspected that they were sharing the drug. Blood tests confirmed those suspicions. I understood the consequences this could have on the integrity



## **Just Enough Words**

of the trial, but also, when it comes to my patients, I adhere to the precept *Primum non nocere*. I was faced with an unusual ethical dilemma.”

Ultimately, I decided .....

## The Summer of '67

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On a hot summer day in July, the founding law partners of the firm Cochran and Rabinowitz- specializing in torts, criminal and civil rights - were having a cognac to celebrate the favorable decision they had won in a lengthy and arduous court battle. Kenzie Cochran had been born and raised in the heart of black Detroit. He was educated at a local university and law college. Afterwards he joined the local county Legal Aid Society where he met Charles Rabinowitz.

Charles was born on Detroit's fringes but was raised in a neighboring white suburban town. Later, with the unwelcome intrusion of the migrating black population, his parents, along with their relatives, friends and neighbors, hastily fled their town. He was schooled at an Ivy League university and law school, clerked with a prestigious federal judge and then met Kenzie.

Perhaps it was the euphoria of their victory and/or the alcohol, but because of the day's date, July 23, the conversation turned to the riot and/or rebellion that had started on that date in Detroit more than 40 years earlier. Although they had been law partners and friends for more than 25 years, because this topic was potentially incendiary, the conversation had always been avoided. But this time they broke the taboo and, during the discussion, they learned that each had kept a diary chronicling the events that transpired that historic week. They went to their respective offices, retrieved their memoirs and exchanged them for reading. This is what they wrote.

Sunday, July 23, 1967

Kenzie - A rebellion against the white establishment, especially the police, started today. It began at a blind pig near my home where I had

## Just Enough Words

dropped by to celebrate the Tigers beating the Yankees 11-4 in Detroit. I know that blind pigs are illegal, but they are harmless and welcoming social clubs. My friends and I had celebrated our graduation from high school just a month ago at the same place. Proms are for Whitey. Besides, the legitimate clubs and restaurants don't want our kind, young or old.

When we arrived, the place was packed with people celebrating the return of two brothers from 'Nam - a war started by white people using black people to kill yellow people. It was too crowded and noisy and I couldn't get the attention of the bartender, so I left.

Around three in the morning, as I was going home, I saw the cops had crashed the blind pig and were arresting everyone who had been inside to celebrate. A crowd of about 200 gathered to watch and protest the arrests. Some started to yell, "Go home, Whitey. Why don't you go fuck with white people?" Some threw bricks and bottles at the police vans hauling away the club patrons. Someone broke the window at the clothing store next to the blind pig and the rebellion rapidly spread throughout the neighborhood.

I helped break a few windows but would not steal anything. For the first time in my life, I felt free. I was right in what I did to the law. The establishment is mostly white, especially the police who want to control our neighborhoods to line their own pockets. Bribes and extortion is their game. Crazy, but tired, I went home, wrote down these words and then finally to sleep.

I woke a few hours later to the music of Motown blaring from the radios throughout the neighborhood. Touring the glass-covered streets, I heard laughter and saw looting everywhere. People were carrying away food from the grocery store and guns from the pawn shop and rolling sofa's down the street. They even tried to break into the bank. This is unbelievable.

Willie Horton, a Detroit Tiger who used to live in our neighborhood, tried to stop the crowd. After the game (they split a double header with the Yankees, losing the first 2-4 and winning the second 7-3), he showed up in his uniform, stood on a car and pleaded with the angry mob to stop the violence and go home. No one would pay any attention.

A curfew from 9 PM to 5 AM was ordered by the mayor. But the police could not control the large mobs. I walked the streets that night for a little while. The looting continued and the arson started. It was getting too

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dangerous and I went home. Later that evening, the first person was killed. He was a white man who was part of a gang that included blacks that was looting a grocery store. He was killed by the store's owner.

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Charles - This has been a day like no other. Less than 15 miles away, there is rioting in the streets of Detroit. According to the radio, the mayhem started with some arrests at an illegal blind pig at 3:30 this morning and rapidly escalated throughout the day into looting and arson in many parts of the city. Many of our friends and neighbors are worried about their businesses but are prudent enough not to put their lives at risk.

Before leaving for university in the fall, I have been working at a warehouse that is located near the center of the worst of all this lawlessness. My boss called a few moments ago to tell me not to come to work tomorrow. So I do not have to be up with the chickens in the morning and instead will stay up late following the news and writing in this diary to chronicle both the events and my perspective.

Every morning when I drive to work, I am shocked by the transition of going from my white, prosperous neighborhood, with its spacious homes and manicured lawns, to the squalor and dilapidated homes near the warehouse in Detroit. All of my co-workers are black and with little education. As I got the summer job because we are friends of the owner, some treat me with amusement, others with disdain. It has been an awkward relationship.

Monday, July 24

Kenzie - Using weapons that had been mostly stolen from neighboring stores, the gun fire started last evening and is worse today. The firemen are shot at nearly every time they try to save a building. When the police try to protect them, the gun fire becomes uncontrollable. I have heard that the brothers are also sniping at fire and police stations and even riot-control command posts.

The state police and national guard are now also on the scene. I don't think many of them have been to Detroit before, certainly not our part of

## Just Enough Words

town, and they are more trigger-happy than the police. I also heard that the president wants to bring in federal troops to stop the rebellion.

One of our own politicians, US Representative John Conyers, tried to bring a crowd near my house under control. They just shouted at him asking why he was defending the establishment and called him an Uncle Tom. He stormed away really angry.

I realize that my brothers are destroying the city, but the ruling classes have not listened to our complaints. We have very little representation and the police are corrupt and our enemy. Maybe from the ashes of this revolt will come a better and more equal town.

P.S. The Tigers did not play today.

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Charles - It is very quiet and still in our town. People are either staying in their homes or gossiping with their neighbors. No one is willing to venture into the mayhem to see if their businesses have been destroyed. Detroit is in a state of anarchy. The rioters are shooting at anyone of authority, even the firemen who are trying to save the buildings that have been torched by arsonists. Law enforcement, from the city, county and state, even the national guard, all seem to be unable to control the lawlessness.

I do not understand the reason for all this unrest. Detroit's is regarded as one of the most racially liberal cities in the country. Its mayor, although white, is touted as one of the most liberal in the nation and is known for reforming the police department. There are black politicians elected to the town council, the U.S. Congress and the Board of Education. The city has a prosperous black population and even inner city slums are undergoing major redevelopment. There was even a recent New York Times editorial stating that Detroit had "more going for it than any other major city in the North."

Yet despite all the progress the city has made, mostly with federal tax dollars, there is anarchy, violence and destruction in the streets. I fear that the town will never be able to recover.

## George Francis Reid

Tuesday, July 25

Kenzie - There are tanks in the streets. It looks like photos I've seen of the Russians invading Budapest. It seems that these are effective weapons for putting down the rebellions of the oppressed. There does not seem to be much difference between the Russian and American ruling classes.

The tanks arrived when the president finally called in the 82nd Airborne. They are all Vietnam vets (including some black brothers), trained in guerilla warfare, and many are armed with machine guns. Unlike the police and national guard, the paratroopers are not trigger-happy and very effective. The rebels seem to be moving away from the soldiers and into other neighborhoods. The uprising will probably soon be over and I hope that no one else dies.

P.S. The Tigers had the day off.

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Charles - This seems to be a historic day. The president has mobilized federal troops and there are tanks rolling through the streets of Detroit. I cannot recall such heavily armored combat vehicles ever patrolling the streets of any U.S. city. This is not a good precedent.

In our town, some of my own neighbors are becoming more paranoid and anxious about the escalating vandalism and looting in Detroit. I do not know whose fertile imagination started the rumor, but the word around town is that the rioters are planning to lay siege to our local shopping center. The thinking is that the army will force the mob away from Detroit and, as we border its city limits and are protected only by a small police force, we are the next logical target. Local logic also surmises that there is nothing left worth looting or stealing in Detroit and that it is time to move on to greener and less protected pastures. The rumor is spreading like brushfire in high winds. This is ridiculous.

Wednesday, July 26

Kenzie - There are no more tanks or soldiers in my neighborhood, but I can hear gun fire and smell smoke. Everyone, except my grandmother,

## Just Enough Words

thought it safe enough to come out of their homes and tour the neighborhood. The streets have even more glass and the children are collecting bullet casings - some souvenir. The stores are just empty shells and some are charred. Everyone is in a quiet mood, some in tears.

P.S. No game today.

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Charles - The rioting may be abating in Detroit, but matters are becoming more ominous by the minute in our town. The agitation amongst a band of vigilantes has reached a fever pitch. Some of my neighbors are organizing to take up arms and defend our local shopping center. Perhaps it is our close proximity to Detroit that gives them their justification, but I am shocked that these seemingly innocuous people even own guns - not for sport but for defense. I liken these events to watching a bad Western movie.

Thursday, July 27

Kenzie - I can only hear gunfire and see smoke from the roof of my apartment building. The TV reporters say that the upheaval is almost under control and that there have been thousands of arrests. We all wonder if we know anyone who has been killed, injured or arrested and how much damage has been done in the city.

P.S. The Tigers were in Baltimore today and beat the Orioles 4-0.

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Charles - The riot is abating and my neighbors have become placated and placid. The chief of our local police force has assured everyone that his patrolmen have not sighted any "trouble" trespassing our borders and that there was no reason to get riled-up. He insisted that they let his men do their jobs.

## George Francis Reid

Friday, July 28

Kenzie - By all reports, the rebellion is over. The soldiers are returning to the bases they set up in town. Everyone is starting to go about their business and the talk is about when they will be able to go back to work; they badly need the paycheck.

Now that this is all over, I can return to trying to find a job to pay for my college education. Maybe I can find one with a construction company fixing all the damage done to the city. The work will be hard and the hours long, but the pay should be good and there are not many job opportunities for black kids right out of high school.

I will still be living at home while I attend school, but an education is my key to a better life. I look forward to the future both for myself and Detroit.

P.S. The Tigers played in Chicago and defeated the White Sox 7-4. During the rebellion, the Tigers did not lose any games and tied one. At least something good happened this week.

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Charles - The riot has been quelled. Our hometown shopping center remains

un-assaulted. Some neighbors wonder if it is safe to go into Detroit to see if there has been any damage to their businesses. Others are considering asking their employees who live in the city to go investigate.

Assuming the building where I work has not been destroyed, I should soon be receiving a call from my boss about returning to work. I wonder if it will affect the already tenuous relationship I have with my black co-workers. Will the upheaval be a topic of conversation? Were any of them impacted - injured, vandalized, arrested or even killed?

I also wonder if the riot will affect the relationship between the black and white students at my alma mater. I cannot imagine that this week's events will help bridge the cultural divide. I think I will suggest to the high school's principal that sensitivity sessions, in small groups, be held in all the social studies classes. Through dialog, people should try to benefit from this calamity.



## Just Enough Words

I am also curious to see how it will affect my interactions with the few black students at the university that I will soon attend. The ones that I met during student orientation were brilliant and sophisticated and have probably never lived, let alone visited, a black ghetto. I also am very curious to learn their opinions about the civil unrest and its aftermath. It should be an intellectually stimulating first year at school.

### Epilogue

After they finished reading each other's diaries, they returned them, silently nodded to each other, waved goodbye, left the office and drove to their respective homes - Charles' in the suburbs and Kenzie's in Detroit. That evening they each opened their diaries and made the following entries.

Monday, July 23, 2007

Kenzie - This nation was founded by rebellion that sadly started with some arson, looting and worse. In Detroit and elsewhere, the revolts did slowly, but gradually, awaken the nation to the realization that this was not a land of equal opportunity. Civil rights and affirmative action laws were enacted so that today we even have a black President. Nevertheless there is more that needs to be done and with Charles help our firm tries to right some of the wrongs.

Detroit has become a predominately African American city and so have its elected officials. During the ensuing years, it has also become the great social experiment. With massive infusions of money from the federal government, the town has tried to undergo a renaissance. The progress has been slow.

As can happen with any governmental official, black or white, graft and corruption has plagued this city. One recent mayor has even served time in jail, and will probably serve more. The approval of legalized gambling and tax incentives to corporations has brought some progress. Nevertheless, crime, particularly drug related, is rampant. It has become so uncontrollable that otherwise law-abiding citizens have taken the law into their own hands and have burned down the crack houses in their neighborhoods,

## George Francis Reid

especially on Devil's Night. The schooling is woefully substandard and there is little community pride. Sadly, the people continue to flee to the suburbs.

But this is the city of my birth and will remain my city upon my death. I am here to help it prosper, so long as it is within the bounds of the law.

P.S. The 1967 season for the Tigers was 91 wins, 71 losses and one tie. They finished in third place.

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Charles - Regardless of the reasons for the civil unrest, and some were justified, those that violated the law needed to be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible. It is tragic that many people lost their lives, even those who died while committing a crime, but, if left unpunished, then the law becomes worthless and the rule of the mob becomes the law.

Nevertheless, the riots during that decade in Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Chicago, Newark and elsewhere did arouse in me the realization that the South is not the only part of the U.S. where there is social injustice for many blacks. As a lawyer, I assiduously defend my clients' civil rights. With our offices in Detroit and the surrounding suburbs, there is no shortage of clients to represent for Kenzie, myself and our army of associates.

Ironically, nearly all of the residents of my former hometown are black and so are the customers who frequent that never-besieged shopping center. Most of the whites, including my parents, left for more prosperous neighborhoods. They fled in advance of the black immigrants who were seeking better homes, education and opportunities for their children. Their quest is becoming a reality.

The community in the metropolitan Detroit area where my family and I now reside is integrated and is a place where the people, even minorities, are represented and respected. It is a place of harmony and tranquility for everyone. It was a long time in coming.

P.S. The riot - or rebellion - left 43 people dead, 1,189 injured, 7,231 arrested, 2,509 stores looted or burned, 388 families homeless and an estimated \$40 million to \$80 million worth of damage, including to some of our neighbors' businesses.

## **Just Enough Words**

In my hometown there were no deaths, injuries, arrests, looting, burning or homelessness - no losses whatsoever. There was prejudice, paranoia and agitation.

# The Spectators

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During the crowded intermission, all it required was a careless spill on that imported marble floor and, in no time flat, he was on his back, dazed, in pain and bleeding from the back of his balding and graying head. He was surrounded by a person wearing a medical staff jacket, a police officer, a member of the security team and an unrelated, compassionate, commiserating, hand-holding woman. Beyond them were the Spectators.

Flanking him were two lines of people waiting to buy food and/or drink, the latter mostly of the alcoholic variety. While the unfortunate man grimaced and bled, some of the customers nonchalantly stared at him; others did their best to ignore him. Crowded around and between the refreshment lines, the Spectators were shocked, dumfounded, repulsed, curious and blasé. Some felt pity, others schadenfreude.

Some of the Spectators made multiple tours of the scene. With each successive excursion their viewing times became longer and their perspective of the man's plight altered. At times the number of Spectators, first timers and returners, became so large, that the viewing lines, formed from opposing directions, created a vortex of people towards the fallen man.

Excited about this sophisticated event, his wife had dressed fashionably, but modestly. Now her emotions transitioned from panic, to terror, fear, sorrow and finally confusion. Before her lay her husband, supine for such a seemingly long time that she was brought a chair to help unburden her troubles. She received some consoling comments but otherwise felt alone.

Finally, with aid from the medical staff person and police officer, he cautiously sat up. The pain had lessened; the blood had ceased flowing. He gave his wife a reassuring smile. The Spectators did not cheer or even utter a sigh of relief.

## **Just Enough Words**

Suddenly, bells chimed and lights dimmed; intermission was over. The Spectators dispersed and returned to the evening's entertainment.

# Thumbs Talk

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They have been a couple for many months, cohabiting even longer. They like to dine out together and often. They think the occasion offers them good food and good companionship. On any given night, they can be found at one of their many favorite restaurants. Their plates and glasses are near empty and, as they have done for the entire evening, both of them are thumbing text messages on their mobile phones.

Sometimes, they will put some food in their mouths while engaging in some banal or inane conversation. But then they will pause, stare at each other, swallow their food and return to their phones. More often, between bites and sips, if not texting, they check the weather, the stock reports, sports news, and much more - there are millions of apps. This is their concept of a meaningful relationship.

There is reason to wonder if their children will be born with hunched shoulders, bowed heads and muscular thumbs.

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Across town, during their weekly family meal, father, mother, two daughters and son are found at their dining room table in complete silence. No, they are not having a pre-meal prayer or meditation. Nor are their mouths filled with food or drink. Instead, they are all hunched over their mobile phones. One of them is rapidly pressing thumbs to telephonic keyboard.

Every now and again, another of them will suddenly look up and giggle, point an index finger into the air and hurriedly thumb their response. The others wait for their screens to display the message to partake in the merrymaking. The only other movement is the occasional handling of a fork, knife, spoon, glass or napkin.

## Just Enough Words

Dinner will climax with rapidly moving thumbs, fingers pointing upwards, a wide range of joyous facial expressions, giggles sometimes escalating into uproarious laughter and then a return to the phones.

One can only imagine the repartee.

The family that clicks together sticks together.

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Next door, there is no dining together, laughter (not even giggles) nor thumbs tapping phones. Instead, there are fingers pointing, screaming, accusations and recriminations - a constant circumstance. Mother and Daughter are close to an unladylike round of fisticuffs. Instead, with the words "Drop dead!" and a slam of the door, Daughter leaves the house. Mother, still angry, is in tears.

Hours later, Daughter is window shopping at the Veblen Mall. Mother is frantic. Between trying to text a message to Daughter, she calls all of her friends. None have seen her or know her whereabouts. Mother tours the neighborhood, especially Daughter's usual haunts.

Still hours later, Daughter decides to text her friends about her argument with Mother. Instead she finds a message that reads, "Are you alright?" (Mother does not know text messaging slang). Tired and lonely, Daughter replies "ya" (yes).

More tears for Mother, but this time of relief. The conversation continues:

Mother: I love you

Daughter: bfd (a common abbreviation for big fucking deal)

Mother (sighing): This was a silly argument.

Daughter: i h8t y00 (I hate you)

Mother (after finding a text slang dictionary to translate the text, writes): I love you.

Daughter: dc (don't care)

Mother: I still love you. Talk to me.

## George Francis Reid

Daughter (after a long pause): y dnt u ltm (why don't you listen to me?)

Mother: I'm trying. Talk to me; I'm listening.

Daughter: y cnt i hv t#3 nu ph? (Why can't I have the new phone?)

Mother (sighing): We cannot afford another new phone. You know, since your father left, we have been short of money.

Daughter: whteve (whatever)

Mother (another sigh): Darling, you'll have to find a way to earn it.

Daughter: ? (How?)

Mother: We'll find a way. OK?

Daughter: ok

Mother: I love you

Daughter: M2 (Me too)

Mother: Where are you?

Suddenly the ground shakes violently. The topography has changed. Lives have changed.



## Who Pays for Mother?

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She had led an extravagant lifestyle, now her savings were depleted. What with all her ailments and complaining, her children groaned that they had never thought that she would live so long. And now there was a family feud about who should pay Mother's waxing expenses in her waning years.

She had borne three children. The first, the son, had inherited the family business along with his father's bad habits. He was an uneducated lout who spent more than he earned on palatial homes, fast cars and transient women - some with children he fathered but refused to support.

Her second child, a daughter, earned multiple degrees in the health-care profession and had enjoyed a productive and rewarding career. Now retired, she happily lived with her neurotic, brilliant, self-made multimillionaire husband and enjoyed a quiet life making music and socializing.

Mother's youngest daughter had led the life of a model housewife and part-time realtor. Her modest-sized home was tidy and fashionable. Her husband and children were content. But after this daughter's retirement, Mother decided to relocate to be "close". Now there were days when it seemed that, yet again, the youngest daughter was tending to the needs of a young child and the burden was hers alone.

With Mother's relocation came the purchase of a large condominium nestled in an upscale retirement community, which included a \$100,000 outlay for re-decorating. These expenses put her bank balance at nearly nothing. With this realization, she concluded that she was being cheated by one or more of her children.

Mother needed money and her offspring's fingers began to point. At first the fingers pointed to the issue of what had happened to all of her money. Then the fingers were re-directed to who was going to support her.

The youngest daughter reminded her siblings that Mother had control of the checkbook. She also reminded them that it was she who had been

## George Francis Reid

taking care of Mother and that it was she who could least afford to support her.

The son pleaded poverty. He claimed that, despite all his apparent wealth and extravagant lifestyle, he was broke. Besides, he argued, for many years, when she asked, he had given Mother money.

From these arguments and considering their respective financial situations, the oldest and youngest siblings jointly decided that their other sister should bear the sole burden. This sister was fuming and speechless - but not her husband. He was willing to pay their fair share and thought that, after some dialog with the others, a reasonable and amicable solution would be reached. But it was not to be.

Instead, words were spoken that should never be remembered. Words that were not spoken, but considered, included putting Mother on welfare, but that would humiliate them all. During calmer conversations, suggestions such as moving Mother into more modest housing or even into the youngest daughter's home - "Over my dead body," exclaimed the daughter - were bandied about. The siblings had reached an impasse and Mother was still without money, becoming more hysterical by the day.

Will Mother have to move out of her condo? Will the son suddenly discover some hidden assets?? Will the youngest daughter rise from the dead and move Mother into her home??? Or, will the oldest daughter finally speak and begrudgingly pay all of Mother's future expenses????

Stay tuned.

# My Birthing Desk

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Unbeknownst to anyone, there is a phenomenon of Nature that I am the first to report. During our in-utero gestation, about 266 days in all, we human fetuses can clearly see and hear beyond our mother's womb. But to keep it a secret, Nature designed this prenatal perception so that we also forget all those prenatal experiences before we are born. Apparently I have a mutation; I did not forget and this was my experience.

My first recollection was of my parents taking me to the doctor. He listened to my fast but regular heartbeat and told my parents that, despite their wishes, my birth would have to be at the hospital and not at home. That pronouncement went over like a pregnant pole vaulter.

My mother, never daunted when it came to her children, my father and I met with another doctor, one with experience delivering babies in Africa. She also listened to my heart beat, but with an unconventional Pinard Horn, and told us about a local (much to my relief because I thought we might be going to Africa) midwife who was available to help with the delivery. She also provided us with a birthing list and instructions about how to prepare our apartment for the event. The wait began.

Time marched by quickly and as my world began to shrink my mother's belly grew, along with her appetite. We visited the doctor regularly and I developed a human appearance. The sonogram told them what I already knew; I was a healthy boy. There was much anticipation and excitement by all and much discussion about what was to be my name.

Many names were considered, some derived from contemporary books, movies and songs. My father's suggestions reflected his sense of the ridiculous; my mother's were more traditional. They did not like the many suggestions from friends and, above all, my grandparents. No one asked my opinion.

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As the time grew near, they prepared the apartment for the happening. With me along for the ride, they purchased an assortment of items including towels, pots, sterile pads and a bed pan. My father dragged their well-worn but sturdy desk into their bedroom. Mom climbed aboard and we decided it was suitable for my delivery. Dad also set up his sophisticated tape recorder so that we could relive the event for years to come.

And then it suddenly happened. The fluid that had immersed and protected me was flowing away and my mother, with a sense of relief and excitement, declared it was time. Phone calls were made and the midwife and my father instantly appeared.

Overnight, my mother lay in the bed she usually shared with my father. She uttered no sounds of pain or even discomfort. She did not notice father's pacing, nor the midwife measuring her dilations. She simply meditated about me and the birth.

With the coming of the early morning, the midwife declared my birth imminent and the doctor suddenly appeared. My mother was awakened from her meditations and with father turning on the tape recorder, she once more ascended onto the desk. The final preparations were made, anticipation was at a peak and all was ready.

I soon appeared and then disappeared, again and again. The umbilical cord, my conduit between mother and me, had become wrapped around my ankles and was preventing my egress. This cycle of events was becoming exhausting and frightening for all. My heart rate was dropping. There was apprehension. It was off to the hospital.

With the strength that comes from a woman in labor, my mother gingerly slithered and slid off the table, walked out of the apartment, into the elevator, into the waiting car, into the hospital and into the delivery room. During all these travails, I, of course, did my best to cooperate. When my mother left the table, the cord had unwrapped from my ankles and I was ready to emerge. But, given all the rushing about, I thought it prudent to wait until we arrived in the delivery room.

My mother was anxious to return home, but the law of the land required her to wait one hour. The time was not wasted. She studied me carefully, thought about the day's events and the days to come and I was named... Terrell.

# My Byline

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## THE PUPIL

We're on Watch

Thursday, May 17, 2012

Visiting the Nursing Home

By George Wesley

Senior Student Correspondent

As a project for our Social Studies class, I, along with three classmates, have been visiting the local nursing home. We go for two hours each week. At first I was nervous about being at the home, but after awhile, the residents' welcoming smiles and friendly gestures made me feel more comfortable. When we walk in the door, those who are awake greet us with such excitement. Now, I look forward to those visits.

When I first entered the building, although I was impressed with its cleanliness, the foul smell of urine, feces and disinfectant was unmissable. It explained why the halls have carts filled with diapers, extra portable commodes and the flooring is linoleum.

The hall ceilings have glaring fluorescent lighting. The walls are lined with hand rails to support those who are able to walk and to provide something to grasp for those who want to pull their wheelchair along. Bumpers near the floor guard against wheelchair accidents.

In case of a fire, there is an abundance of alarms and sprinklers and the hall doors automatically close. At the end of the main hall is a locked door that requires a passcode for entry and exit. The residents tell me it is for "special people." When I ask why they are special, they frown and look away.

The home is filled with an assortment of wheelchairs (both manual and motorized) that are in various states of disrepair. At times during the day,

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the halls (especially at intersections) become so congested with vehicular and pedestrian traffic that a crossing guard should be present. Sometimes the wheelchair-bound need a push from a helping hand.

The residents' appearance can be unnerving. They are frail, shrunken, stooped, disfigured, have all sorts of different kinds of blemishes and their breath smells. Many are so severely arthritic that they are crippled and cannot hold anything. It is hard for me to imagine that, one day, I may be like them.

Some of them talk constantly (sometimes incoherently), while others never utter a word. Some will repeatedly ask the same question. When given the opportunity, the residents like to talk about their favorite topics of conversation. When they can recall it, it is usually about their past, seldom their future.

When I cannot understand what a resident is telling me, I guess what they are trying to say by their facial expressions and respond accordingly. So far they seem satisfied.

Each week a certain resident will proudly tell me that her "eighty-fifth birthday was yesterday." Others ask, "Have we met before? I know you from somewhere."

Many tell me that they do not belong at the home and that they will soon be returning to their own homes. They all complain about the food and that their days are boring. Their favorite complaint is that there are not enough activities, and then 15 minutes later, they will fall asleep.

The home seems like a place of gossip, confusion, wishes, reminisces, tedium, resignation and sometimes sorrow. Not too unlike our high school.

But through it all, some of the residents try to maintain their sense of humor. During one visit I heard one male resident remark to a female nurse about her "beautiful backside." Another talks about how he is awoken to go for an obligatory tour on the home's shuttle bus so that he can go back to sleep. Another, while being wheeled in his bed to a new room, was asked where he was going. He replied, "To the liquor store."

There is one resident whom I particularly enjoy speaking with. Most afternoons he can be found in the Common Room buckled into his wheelchair. Alongside him is his wife, strapped to her wheelchair and slumped in what he calls her "senile stupor."

## Just Enough Words

Although he can be intimidating, his deep purple lips always greet me with a welcoming grin and he fondly “regales” me with stories about his days as a “writer.” He tells me that he “unprofessionally contributes pieces to the home’s gazette.”

He asks me all sorts of questions about my life; alas I fail to give him adequate answers. I would like to ask him more about his past but hesitate because I don’t want to be intrusive.

There are times that I can see that he is having trouble moving his wheel chair. I would like to offer to help but am afraid that he will get insulted. He is a very independent person.

We meet the residents in the Common Room. Our “activities” begin by organizing games for them to play. This usually starts with a board game. The games are located on bulging shelves that line one of the walls of the room. Most of the boxes are so worn-out that they can barely hold their contents.

Their favorite game is gambling using a home-made horse racing set. The horses are plastic toys and the track is drawn by crayon on a roll of paper. A roll of the dice determines how many squares their horses can advance. Although the winnings are just funny money, they take this game seriously.

Next, we try to entertain them by singing some of our favorite Hip Hop songs, accompanied by a Karaoke player. Most of them fall asleep; many cannot hear us, no matter how loud we sing and play the music.

Although the Common Room is crowded, it is unusual for the residents to converse with each other. The TV is loud but does not entertain them (although some of the soap operas look interesting). They are either asleep, sitting alone in a stupor or staring out the window. So after the games and singing, we try to socialize with them either in small groups or individually.

The residents seem very bored. Despite the lack of interest, their best companion is the TV. Often, if they refuse to leave their own homes, their children can convince them by offering a new TV for their room at the home. Ironically, almost all of the residents will tell you that they would prefer to be back in their own homes and that they miss their children.

## George Francis Reid

Unfortunately, their personal TVs can lead to conflicts. If the person with the TV is deaf and their roommate is not, the noise for the latter can be, well, deafening. If both roommates have TVs, are deaf and are watching different programs, then it's all Babel.

Sometimes, during my weekly visits I will notice that one of the residents is missing and I will be told that he or she had died. Sadly, this is an all-too-common occurrence, particularly when there is a flu breakout in the building. Happily, there are occasions when the reason the resident is absent is because one of their children has taken them away for the day.

When a resident dies, his or her room is quickly cleaned and repainted so that the next person, from a very long waiting list, can move in. The home is a place of continual ingress and egress.

My class assignment has finished and school will soon end. I do not know how often I will be able to visit the home, but I will make every effort. I think about the residents' lives and if their fate will be mine. It is a worrying thought.

Grateful Acknowledgement: I would like to thank the resident writer for his constructive criticisms and extensive editing of this piece. And, for expanding my meager vocabulary. My thanks to all of the residents for welcoming my fellow volunteers and me into their home. As one of your favorite entertainers used to sing, "Thanks for the memory."

THE GERIATRIC GAZETTE  
Growing Old Together  
Thursday, May 17, 2012  
Local Youngsters Pay Some Visits  
By George Stace  
Senior Resident Correspondent

For the past few months we have had pleasure of the company of four students from our local high school. As a part of a Social Studies class community service project, they grace us with their presence for two hours a week.



## Just Enough Words

As many of you know, I am 95 years old and strapped to my wheelchair (in the Fowler's position) most of my waking hours, unable to do nearly anything unassisted. Yet, compared to my wife, mate and best friend for 72 years, my condition is good. She suffers from Alzheimer's disease and with each passing day slips further into oblivion. It pains me beyond words to witness the deterioration of this once beautiful and vivacious woman.

For that reason, to have these youngsters punctually visit each week to provide us with some socialization and entertainment is a welcome departure from our daily trials and tribulations.

Our monotonous board games (of which we have a vast and varied collection) and idiotic television shows become more interesting. For a brief period each week, our days are not so boring and tedious.

While they wait for our Recreation Supervisor to rouse and organize us, the students watch the television, spellbound. Often they will sit and watch from an isolated location. Other times they will sit on the couch next to a resident and converse about the broadcasted soap opera. But then begin the games, followed by the students' musical performances (I don't know how they can make that racket) and we all feel at home.

We residents envy the students their youth, particularly their appearance, vitality and the many years that await them. Alas, those days are behind us denizens of this home.

I have befriended one student in particular. He mumbles aspirations of becoming a journalist and I have dubbed him with that name.

I use all my well-honed skills as an inquisitor to learn as much about The Journalist as possible. As a prelude to more in-depth queries, I casually ask about his classes and if he has a favorite. I receive only the briefest of replies. Learning about him will take time, something I have in abundance - or maybe not.

Although he is reticent, there is intelligence in his eyes and a warmth to his shy smile. Being in his presence reminds me of my youth. I yearn for those days. Despite my former globetrotting, I ponder the adventures I yearned to experience and the opportunities that I missed. I also wonder what The Journalist will be like if he reaches my age.

There is bonhomie between us, but there is also an awkward gulf which seems unbridgeable. For example, there are times when I do not have the

## George Francis Reid

strength to move my wheel chair and I wish in vain that he would offer to help.

He spends a lot of time staring at the passcode-protected locked door leading to the Dementia Care Unit. He seems both curious and afraid of what might lurk inside. What to tell him?

Naturally, The Journalist becomes upset by the frequency with which we residents die. Too soon he will come to realize that, from the moment we are born, we are destined to die (a witticism authored by someone this ancient memory cannot recall). It's all a just matter of time.

I watch my fledgling correspondent survey our building and wonder what his senses have discovered. What I have discovered is that, although the building gives the appearance of being institutional, for most of us, it is Home. The floors grip our rubber- soled shoes securely. The walls have hand rails and bumpers for our mobility and assurance. Our sophisticated fire protection system provides much relief. The staff continuously keeps the place immaculately clean and the food is palatable and wholesome.

Life here can be boring and tedious and we residents would prefer to be back in our own homes, surrounded by our children. But, those days are gone and this is our home - and sometimes our children visit.

I think that these youngsters still are afraid of us and view us as aliens from another planet. As they make their weekly goodbyes, I secretly hope that they all enjoy a long, healthy and fulfilling life. And that, one day, they will have access to such a wonderful homes as ours.

The school session will soon end and I do not know how often, if at all, the students will return to visit. In their absence, we will fondly remember the youth and vitality they brought into the building. Their seemingly boundless physical and intellectual energy will resonate throughout our Home.

Your Correspondents Note: Due to the words I have written for this piece, it is intended not only for my fellow residents, but for all. I had the opportunity and privilege to edit the article that The Journalist contributed to his high school newspaper. He need not have reciprocated. Nevertheless, I would like to thank him for his caring companionship and friendship. To the other volunteers, on behalf of all of us, our thanks for your time and attention. But you all need a new musical routine.

# Happy Birthday, Jesus

---

I recently read in the town weekly that a local church was holding a birthday party for Jesus. The announcement gave me pause for speculation. What sort of gift do you get for a circa 2,016- (not 2,011) year-old person? What would Jesus want for a present?

After some consideration and deliberation, I concluded that he would want peace on earth, particularly in the land of his birth; respect and tolerance for all religions; and a copy of the bible, although he may be astonished by and disappointed with its contents.

If he were to receive all the gifts given in the song “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” it would have cost the gift giver the tidy sum of \$27,673.22. But such gifts, despite the remarkable price tag, would be passé.

Instead, more likely, he would receive a 52-inch widescreen 3D television with surround sound; a video game console along with a collection of its most popular games, some violent; a multiple-gadget charging station; a personalized pub gift; a remote-controlled flying helicopter; a certificate for a tandem skydiving experience; robotic valet; a 45-inch, wall-mounted, lighted jewelry armoire; a slot car race set; a hands-free hair rejuvenator; a clinically proven dental teeth whitening machine and a 10-foot pop-up Christmas tree.

Merry Christmas  
December, 2011

# The Spot

---

Twice he was told that it was pneumonia, but months of antibiotics did not make either the spot or the pain in his chest vanish. So they inserted a tube into his lung and removed a bit of the spot. He had not smoked for more than thirty years, but the packs-a-day of unfiltered cigarettes that he had previously smoked for more than thirty years had produced tumors in his lung and bones.

After years of grieving over the loss of his wife, life had just started to become enjoyable again. He was spending time with his children, grandchildren and a woman friend. He was even making appreciable amounts of money in the stock market. And then the spot appeared.

The doctor's facial expression told all - he did not need to hear the words. The words spoke of a poor prognosis and limited treatment options. His body became constricted, his existence collapsing. Then, as he had done during the war, he regained control and clarity. He would find a solution. He would survive.

Having witnessed his wife's ineffective treatment and fate, he had developed a mistrust of the medical profession, but his wrath was reserved for the mountebanks in the pharmaceutical industry. Their drugs might benefit them, but not him. Searches of the Internet would provide him with options. He found plenty of alternative treatments that were substantiated by people with capitalized letters after their names. He had found options. And so, although gasping for breath, he grasped for life.

But as the size of his tumors increased, so did the frequency of those gasps, as well as his persistent and pervasive pain. He could not function and he needed help. He phoned the family. They rushed to his aid. They found his transformation frightening. A once strong and vibrant person could now barely move for fear of further pain. Swallowing even his saliva was a struggle and he was tethered to an oxygen tank - his constant companion.

## Just Enough Words

They conferred with his doctors. They pleaded with him to try chemotherapy. They told him it could help relieve the pain, it might add months to his life. Their incessant pleas were grating. He acquiesced and consented to meet with an oncologist. Surely the meeting would be easier than arguing.

With a daughter and son, a scientist, accompanying him, he entered the hospital via a wheel chair, his oxygen tank along for the ride. He passed the smokers, some of them cancer patients, standing outside in the frigid weather. It was a place where such sights were commonplace.

He found the waiting room filled with despair and death. While waiting for his appointment, he was greeted by a hospital volunteer who offered coffee, donuts and advice - schedule his chemotherapy sessions for the first of the day or else spend many hours in the waiting room. It seemed that nothing would be on time except his death.

The physician, foreign-born and -trained, spoke softly and unintelligibly. The consultation lasted ten minutes, including the time required to give him the fact sheets. As fast as his wheel chair would allow and with a burst of energy he no longer thought possible, he fled the exam room, the waiting room, the volunteer, the lobby and the smokers outdoors.

Back in the comfort of his home, after struggling to swallow some soup, he regained some strength and composure and was ready to comprehend what the doctor mumbled was written on the fact sheets. There were to be two drugs that would infuse his body. They might benefit him. They most certainly would cause frequent diarrhea, vomiting, hair loss, mouth sores, susceptibility to infections and, if it was possible, even more exhaustion.

He concluded that his cynicism about the pharmaceutical industry and their products was well justified. He would order the alternative remedies from the Internet. At least they were not poisonous and they were purported to be beneficial.

Later that day, he discussed his self-prescribed plan with his son, confident of his options and their possible rewards. His son was stunned. He knew that these alternative remedies were no more effective than the "snake oil" medicaments sold a century ago. They were marketed to prey on the ignorant and desperate. With trepidation in his voice, he struggled to find the words to convey that these remedies offered no hope.

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He spoke those true but tragic words and they both fell silent. There could be no encouraging words for the Father. Father's options were reduced to one. Whispering "That's it," he tearfully retreated from the room and prepared for his approaching death.

# Eddie

---

Labor Day had departed and the school buses arrived, but this year some of the buses brought students we had never seen before. Mandated by Congress and ordered by a federal judge, neighboring black students were going to share our school.

In my younger years I was told that our neighborhood was a liberal and enlightened community, where bigotry was a blemish and such words as Negroes, or the more derogatory, were seldom uttered aloud - but often muttered. And while the term “black” seemed socially acceptable, because our recent arrivals lived in the neighboring township, often they were referred by the euphemism “township students” or, more often, the “T.S.” I prefer the acceptable to the euphemistic.

I was also told that there was much to contrast between this clash of cultures. Ours was composed of well-educated, middle-class merchants and aspiring executives. Theirs was impoverished, disadvantaged, crime-ridden and uneducated. They did not even speak like us.

Before their arrival to our school, most of our exposure to blacks were the maids who frequently worked in some of our homes. Each morning they could be seen arriving from the bus stops, walking the streets to their place of work and then, late that afternoon, reversing their route. Those of us who had maids in our homes gave them little consideration.

Despite the judge’s order, there was little integration between the two student populations. Between classes we migrated in different herds along the halls. In class the black versus white ratios varied depending on the subjects taught. The black students enjoyed gym and industrial arts while the whites gravitated towards the academic, university-required, courses. Seldom did the twain meet.

Where black did meet white was in the cafeteria line where the blacks would “shake down” the whites for pocket change - my mom would give

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me extra change for the perpetrators pockets. It could be a terrifying experience. We also met during study period. Confined to our seats, it was a time that was whiled away in mischief and gossip, not studying - period.

It was during that period that I first fraternized with a first black person. Alphabetically assigned, our desks were alongside each other. Eddie, possessed of a dazzling smile, was the most cheerful person that I had ever met. And, as we both, for different reasons, were outcasts amongst our neighbors, a hesitant conversation began.

Initially our chitchats, although friendly, were stilted and not very personal. But with each passing period we began to welcome and enjoy our time together, even to the extent of nodding, winking, or even smiling to one another as we passed in the halls.

In gym class, the same alphabetical coincidence assigned us adjacent lockers and our relationship continued. After the class work-out, the ordeal of my shower would start. I would disrobe, hastily stuff everything into my locker, cover my pubescent genitals with my right hand and make an anxious dash for the communal shower stall. After a speedy dousing, with no soap, I would swiftly wrap a school-issued towel around my waist and attempt to return to my locker without slipping on the wet floor.

One horrifying day, dripping wet, I found my locker had been opened and my clothing was not in its usual heap. I immediately searched my left shoe where I had hidden my cheap watch and the not-cheap gold ring (with star sapphire) that my parents had given me. They were missing. I searched my right shoe, but they were still missing. I searched the locker floor, but still they were missing.

After the initial shock, I was stricken with three thoughts. The first was "shit" - during pubescence my vocabulary was also puny. The second was that my parents were going to kill me. The third was about who could be the culprit and why would he (certainly not a she) would steal my jewelry? Granted, despite warnings from our teacher, I had carelessly and consistently left my locker door closed but not secured. After all, nothing like this had ever happened before.

Eddie appeared - no towel was wrapped around his waist - just as I was musing about whether it was reckoned a theft if, by not securing my locker, I had invited someone to take my possessions. With moist eyes I



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told him what had happened. His usual bright smile was replaced with an expression of anger and determination and he told me “I’ll be back in a minute.” Five long minutes later he handed me the ring (but not the watch) and lectured me about being more careful.

I do not know how he knew who was the culprit. Appreciating his standing in the pecking order amongst his herd-mates, I do not know how he persuaded the snatcher to return the ring. But I humbly thanked him, admired him and respected him.

With that single act our companionship was bonded, but never beyond the walls of the school. After graduation, the bond was broken.

### Postscript

Recently I received an invitation to attend our high school class reunion. It included a list of our classmates status. Eddie’s was unknown. To no avail, I have electronically searched his all too common name for his whereabouts and fate.

Instead, I shan’t forget those turbulent times. Or Eddie recovering my ring. Or his dazzling smile. He was my friend.

# When Will God Let Us Go?

---

The sun was beginning to rise on this Jewish Sabbath day (twelvemonth, 1946) and, although exhausted and seasick, we were excited to finally see the Golden Gate Bridge on the horizon. But as the troop ship from Shanghai put into the San Francisco pier, we were confronted with a quandary of biblical proportions.

My journey to America has been long, eventful and circuitous. It began when I was eight years old and living with my family a happy and prosperous life in Poland. But my father had the foresight to realize that the German invasion of our homeland was imminent and could have deadly consequences for those of our belief.

With everlasting gratitude to vice-consul Sugihara and Japan's pre-war policy of maintaining good relations with the West - particularly wealthy Jews - with a stroke of his pen, we received visas for Japan and an escape from danger. This policy saved thousands of lives.

Via the Trans-Siberian Railway and a ship sailing from Vladivostok, we soon found our way to Kobe. I spent a year in that wonderful city, learning the language and customs and enjoying the people's hospitality. Unfortunately Kobe was only a transit stop; with Japan's entry into the war, we were soon shipped to Japanese-occupied Shanghai.

In that international city, with the world's seventh largest port and second largest foreign concession, we were warmly welcomed by the Jewish community (both longtime residents and immigrants fleeing the Germans). We were assigned crowded housing, my parents worked menial jobs and I was schooled at a local yeshiva. Summers were sweltering and the winters bone-chilling. This was not like Poland - but we felt secure.

Now allied with Germany, Japan's ally insisted that we Jews be deported back to Europe and to their work camps. The Japanese refused but, as a compromise, we were ordered to relocate into a ghetto. Life became more

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crowded, more impoverished and less healthy. This was definitively not like Poland, but still we felt secure.

Two years, one month and 29 days later, we knew the war was soon to end when, after an awesome display of military power, the United States Army Air Corps bombed Shanghai. In their wake, they left 31 people dead, 250 wounded and 700 homeless.

The Japanese surrendered 29 days later after two atomic bombs descended on their homeland, leaving more than 100,000 people dead, 90,000 wounded and countless homeless.

And now here we stood, on the western doorstep of this land of freedom and opportunity. But because this was the Sabbath, we faced an urgent and serious dilemma - when would God's laws allow us to disembark. Our strict Mosaic laws (Exodus 16:29) prohibited us, on this weekly day of rest and worship, from such activity.

The soldiers had already debarked and, since there were many other ships in the queue waiting to unload, our ship's captain was anxious that we immediately do the same. The chief rabbi knew that I was the only person among us who spoke both Yiddish and English so, despite my age (having just been Bar Mitzvah'd), he asked me to be the interpreter between himself and the other rabbis and the captain. I had a ringside seat for the ensuing parley.

There were arguments among the rabbis. There were debates between the rabbis and the captain. One rabbi contended that, since the trip originated in Shanghai where it was past sundown, we could disembark. Another rabbi, of the here and now persuasion, opined that, as we were in San Francisco, we must wait for sunset. The captain consistently and adamantly argued that we must leave the boat immediately.

In exasperation, the captain threatened that, if we did not go straight-away, he would notify the police and have us physically removed. The rabbis countered that God would strike him dead if he tried to force us to go. They also told him that they were accustomed to being terrorized by the police, had suffered enough at the hands of dictators and would not be intimidated. I could not keep pace with the translations, but I did try to mimic the vehemence in their voices.

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After the chests had been beaten and the sabers rattled, the chief rabbi looked at his watch and finally spoke. In his calm and sage voice, he offered a divine decision. He had reset his watch when the ship had crossed the International Dateline and, according to his watch, it was now after sundown. Accordingly, the exodus from the ship could commence with God's blessing and the captain's smile.

And so we did. And so he did.

## Bizarre Bargaining at the Bazaar

---

It was a balmy 73°F on a mid-February day in Jerusalem and, in preparation for future frigid winters elsewhere, I was looking for a scarf amongst the multitude of shops in the Old City. The shopkeepers were characteristically aggressive and tenacious. A momentary pause in my stride to examine their goods would bring them to my side. Step for step, there they would remain, even after I had long passed their shops. They knew no boundaries.

On a street in the Christian Quarter, I told one particularly persistent, but friendly, dealer what I was seeking. Not finding anything in his vast inventory, he suddenly disappeared into the shop located across the narrow street - nearly all streets in the Old City are narrow - and returned with a stack of scarves.

One, and only one, caught my eye. His eye caught my eye and the bargaining began.

Author (A) - What is your lowest price?

Dealer (D) - Dollars, Euros or Shekels?

A - Dollars.

D - \$250.

A - That is too much.

D - How much will you pay?

A - No more than a tenth that amount.

D - But it is one 100% Cashmere.

A - Where is the label?

D - It was removed, so no taxes.

A - Of course.

“D” then grabbed a calculator, rapidly pressed some keys and announced, “I will meet you half-way. \$120.” (Author’s note - half price is actually \$137.50).

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A - That is still more than I am prepared to pay.

D - \$110. I want to make you happy.

A - Still too much.

D - \$90.

A - I will think about it.

D - \$60.

A - I will give it some thought and return if I am interested.

"D" proceeded to put the scarf into a plastic bag. "I want to make the sale now. \$40."

As I left the store, I repeated "I still want to think about it."

D - \$30.

A - Done. I wanted him to know that I was willing to compromise.

With a smile on my face and a scowl on his, the money and scarf changed hands.

The transaction was completed, but not the episode. I had travelled no more than 100 feet when I was tapped on the shoulder and greeted with an "Excuse me. I am sorry to bother you." I turned around to face a stranger with a strange question. He was the owner of the shop across the narrow street that had owned the scarf I purchased. He wanted to know what was the purchase price. Apparently "D" was not the trustworthy type.

I told him the amount and, with a "D"- like scowl on his face, he thanked me, turned and left. He also left me to mull over what "D" had told him was the price and how they would divide the proceeds of the sale. Would their discussion be acrimonious? I leave it to the reader to mull over the same.

# Home Again

---

What was a nice Jewish boy from the South Bronx doing in the sticks of the deep south in 1972? He had told his friends that the famous university was the lodestone. But truth be told, it was the opportunity to flee his friends and their drugs.

There was a time when the friends and the drugs were fun, but that was another life time ago. He was convinced that staying with them meant his inevitable death. He preferred to make learning his life.

Also, until recently, he had been taking ethical drugs to combat a disease that was more often than not fatal. As fate would have it, his cancer disappeared and he decided to do the same.

Although born in Harlem, his formative years were lived in the tumultuous South Bronx. His philandering father was frequently absent and, when present, was abusive. His neurotic mother, when not constantly working, was a noodge.

Leaving his house every day also had its challenges. Being the only Jew in the neighborhood resulted in knives to the throat, regular beatings and the consequent loss of several teeth. But leaving home every weekday, coupled with his insatiable intelligence, eventually led him to the Bronx School of Science and the opportunity to escape from the neighborhood.

After graduation, he worked his way through a local city college as a usher at Carnegie Hall and later as a manager of a record store. He loved managing that store. He loved the sights, smells and the sounds, especially the variety of music, emanating from that store. He loved his employees and customers, all of whom he regarded as close friends. The store was like no other place - it was his home.

But it was these friends, and their drugs, who were plunging him into a life he did not want to live. He felt trapped and directionless. Ironically it

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was surviving his tumor and its treatment that provoked him into taking a new lease on life and a new direction.

So it was that he found himself in this southern university town where the talk was always about the weather and, in season, basketball. During that season all activity would cease and all ears would gather around the radio to listen to the play-by-play broadcasts of the games.

In this town, if you did not speak basketball, you were not spoken to. And our boy from the Bronx did not speak the language. He eventually discovered other “Yanks” and joined their ranks, but he felt like a foreigner in a very foreign land.

Although the university had provided him with a stipend, it could not meet the cost of living or learning. To help make ends meet, he took a job as a baby sitter (although the children were certainly not babies) for one of the town’s prominent people. One evening, with the children sound asleep and little else to do, he took it upon himself to put away their laundry only to discover a large bundle of greenbacks in the man of the house’s bottom dresser drawer. The next day, after some discreet inquiries, he learned that the man was the town’s drug dealer. It seemed no matter how far he travelled drugs were a way of life.

Despite being surrounded by people, he felt alone. But worse, he felt a sense of loss. There was something missing from his life; an indefinable void.

His routine became classes, studying, babysitting and walking the streets of the town - alone. But then on a sultry summer Sunday evening, with the hour late and the streets deserted, by some cosmic coincidence, it happened. Blowing past him was a familiar- looking yellow plastic bag. He chased after the bag, trapped it with his right foot and studied it under the dim street lamp. To his astonishment, the bag brought a shock of nostalgia to him. It was the same size, color and style of lettering used at his former music store, but this one bore the name and address of a local record store. It was located just a few blocks away. It had been so close to his existence, but in his isolation, so far away.

After an anxious night, he visited the store at its opening hour. The sights, smells and sounds brought a sense of *deja vu*. After some



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introductions, southern-style pleasantries and shop talk, the owner told the saga of his store's founding.

Born and raised in these sticks, by high school, his once delightful childhood had been thrust into the abyss of a drug addiction and an apprenticeship into its commercial aspects. It was during a business trip to New York that he chanced upon THE record store. He became intoxicated with the sights, smells and the sounds of that store and instantly knew that this was the world to which he belonged. Using the profits from his existing business, he recreated THE store back home.

Having found a religion that freed him of his demons, he and his store prospered. Youngsters flocked from near and far to hear, and buy, the sounds of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Neil Young, Stevie Wonder, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Rolling Stones, Eagles, Jefferson Airplane, Kinks, Steely Dan, Bee Gees, Moody Blues, Al Green and many more.

With little in common except their passion for record stores, the two became, and remained, fast friends.

The Boy from the Bronx was at home again. But this home was better.

# Bird Brain

---

Once upon a not-too-distant time, in a not-too-distant biblical land, through an apartment window, Eli came face to face with a dove. Eli was besotted with that dove. Its feathers were a brilliant white, its eyes as blue as the Mediterranean Sea nearby.

The dove did not see Eli through the window. Instead he saw a bird with white feathers and blue eyes. He did not recognize the bird that was co-occupying his space. He would coo loudly at the bird, but all he could hear was his echo.

Eli amusedly watched the dove approach the window and then suddenly retreat. The dove thought the other bird a strange creature. It miffed him that it mimicked his every move.

Eli saw the dove hop and peck at the window. The dove was surprised when the bird hopped and appeared to peck at him. The dove puffed his neck and the bird did the same. The dove spread his wings and the bird did the same. The dove aggressively flapped his wings and the bird did the same. Was this a mocking bird?

Eli saw the dove repeatedly attack the window. The dove bounced off the inanimate object. The dove could not understand why his attacks were thwarted. It was like hitting his head against a wall.

Eli saw that with each successive attempt the dove attacked with greater force, only to be repelled. The dove wondered what kind of strange bird foiled his attacks. With an anger he had never experienced, the dove lowered his head close to his body, fluffed his feathers, dilated his eyes and with all his might lunged at that strange bird.

Eli was horrified to see the dove crash into the window and snap its neck.

The End

## Life in 1949

---

Three years, ten months and ten days after the end of World War Two, for the paltry price of twenty cents, Glenda and Freddie are thumbing through a glossy magazine that has Bob Mathias on its cover and an advertisement for Chiffon Soap Flakes on the back. Young Freddie works as a warehouseman, even younger Glenda as a receptionist. They are going steady, practically engaged. Life is good in 1949.

For their honeymoon, they dream of traveling by train, in one of those fancy sleeper cars, to some exotic place. Afterwards they will buy a modest home and one of those English, full family-size cars. Both will have ample room for children.

But for now they are making plans to see the debut of *Mighty Joe Brown* later in the week. In preparation, Freddie wants to buy some of the leading mouth wash for his halitosis, antiseptic lip balm to keep his lips fit, hair tonic to keep his scalp and hair healthy and a bar of soap that stops odor before it starts. He also plans a nice shave using that patented brushless wetting agent (“sail through even the toughest whiskers”) and a Duridium straight razor (“his face can’t feel”).

With a coy blush, Glenda says she wants to buy for the occasion a strapless bra (“hugs the figure”) and an invisible girdle (“with amazing figure-sliming power”). She also needs some deodorant that stops decaying bacteria (“no love lost due to perspiration”) and have a salon-safe home permanent, using the new spin hair curlers (“Twice as Easy, Twice as Fast”).

Then, one day, the unexpected happens. Freddie, who was too young to serve in the war, is not too young to impregnate Glenda. The event does not lead to tears of joy; instead they are of embarrassment, conflict, fear and sorrow.

Their discussion concerning Glenda’s “predicament” starts with Freddie lighting (“with his new automatic lighter”) one of his Turkish blend

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cigarettes and offering it to Glenda. As a liberated woman she is tempted, but her maternal instinct waves it away.

They agree that no one can know about her condition and they must make a decision before her expanding belly shows. They agree that the options are limited: getting married and having the baby, Glenda taking an extended leave to a home for unwed mothers and placing the child up for adoption, or an abortion. All other discussions about the options become a debate and end in disagreement.

The conversation becomes acrimonious and Glenda grows agitated. Freddie begins to pace in circles around Glenda and argue incoherently. Finally, in frustration, Glenda tells Freddie that he is not making any sense and that she will be making the decision - after all, this is her body. Feeling relieved, Freddie is unable to reply. Instead, he gently places a Swiss watch ("a treasure of lasting pride") that he had bought for Glenda on her lap and runs away.

Gathering her thoughts and emotions, Glenda is confused and conflicted. Lack of sleep and food, usually vomited, leaves her exhausted. She needs a sanctuary. The city bus delivers her to their favorite spot overlooking the town. At its apex is a wooden bench. She sits on top of a engraving that reads "Freddie loves Glenda."

Her thoughts drift back to her childhood. As the oldest of seven children and barely no longer a child herself, Glenda was expected to help take care her siblings. It was burdensome. She wanted to spend her youth with others her age.

Although she never voiced any regret, after Glenda was born, her mother had to give up the job she so enjoyed. With each additional child, by the end of the day, she became increasingly exhausted and weepy. Her father was never any help with taking care of the children. As the family bread winner, his self-assigned chores were limited to masculine activities, such as household repairs and mowing the lawn.

Despite its illegality, Glenda concludes beyond any doubt that having an abortion is the most sensible option. Someday she would like to have Freddie's children, but right now she is too young to bear the responsibility of raising a child. Furthermore, she would have to stop working

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and she needs the money to both support herself and afford getting properly married.

She also knows that she does not want to be trapped in a home for the next seven months and that once she sees the baby, she would not want to give it up for adoption. Finally there is her fear of dying during childbirth.

But then again she considers life a precious gift and wonders if the fetus is alive or a person. Is she committing murder? Will it feel any pain during the procedure? If she has the abortion, what is the risk of her dying or being unable to have another child?

Glenda also puzzles about whether she is being selfish. There are so many couples who want to have children and cannot. Who knows? As an adult her daughter could do great things for the world.

And to be practical, there is the cost to consider. Two hundred and fifty dollars is about two months of her salary, or about the price of a console with two record changers ("a masterpiece of compactness").

The abortion is aborted. The abortionist, a former medical student, scrams when Glenda starts screaming at the sight of her blood flowing from her vagina. While Freddie races her to the hospital in a borrowed car, Glenda continues to scream, and bleed on the upholstery.

Now also screaming, for help, with Glenda in his arms, Freddie hurries into the Emergency Room entrance. He gently lays her on top of a convenient gurney and pushes her to Admitting. Glenda is wheeled into a bay and the curtains are drawn. Freddie is directed towards the waiting room.

The doctor and nurse rush into the bay; no one enters the waiting room. Glenda is panicky; Freddie paces in circles. Glenda is shivering; Freddie is sweating. Glenda's blood pressure and respiration rates are dropping; Freddie's are rising. Soon thereafter, both are at peace.

# Waiting for Some Sign from God

---

The doctors tell me that without more surgery I'll never be able to eat again without feeling really sick to my stomach. So, the only thing that keeps me alive is a machine that pumps "nutrition" into my veins for ten or more hours a day, five or more days a week. I hate that goddamned machine.

I'm too young to have this happening to me. I have always felt good and never ever had to see a doctor. Then about a year ago, I started to have bad cramps in my gut, got thinner and always needed a toilet. My constant complaining made my Mom drag me from doctor to doctor and they all told me I needed surgery. I did, it didn't help and now they tell me I need more. Why me?

Maybe this is God's vengeance for my having been a drug dealer and womanizer. But I found God, stopped sinning, and now that I am on the righteous path, I thought that everything was fine with him.

This time listening to the doctors makes me scared and angry. They all say the same thing: You must have the surgery. There is no guarantee that the procedure will help. You may need a colostomy bag.

If I do get the surgery, then they will cut me up, again, like a slab of meat. The first time was useless. Why would this one be any better? And for the rest of my life I might wind up wearing a bag holding my shit.

If I don't get the surgery, then it's more stomach pain, always going to the toilet and being hooked up to machines.

My friends tell me not to trust the doctors. They only want the money. But doctors are supposed to be smart and professional. They went to medical school, trained for many years and took some sort of oath. I should trust them.

I keep telling myself that, if I wait long enough and let the pump feed me, my insides will heal. Sometimes I try eating small amounts of really bland food, but it makes me very nauseous.

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Even with the nutrition pumped into me, my belly still always hurts and I feel the urge for a bathroom. Problem is, I don't know if it is because of my medical situation or the stress of not knowing what to do.

I keep praying and waiting for some sign, any sign, from God about what I should do. Maybe he has sent one and I just don't know it.

I asked my spiritual leader what I should do. He spoke about many things. I told him I wasn't sure he had answered my question. He replied, "God will guide you." I asked how I will know when God has sent me a sign. With a strange look of his face he told me, "God moves in mysterious ways."

I really need to decide what to do. I'm feeling really sick to my stomach again and I need a toilet. I desperately need some sign from God.

## my xtra kromosome

---

They say that I bernd down my house because of my xtra kromosom. or may be because I am a teen ager. I think because Im me. I like to play with fire. We live now in a much smaller and less nise house because of me.

It was a aksedent. The lade that wachs me and me were the only ones at home. She was in the kitchen toking on her fon. i was watching tv in the living rume. I was cold and wanted to light a fire in the wood stov. Like my dad does.

i put in some logs rool some newz paper and light it with a mach. But it is too hot to hold it. There is fire and smok every where. i cant breth. i cant see. the rume is so hot.

The lade grabed me and we ran for the door. Soon the fire truks came. But it was too laat. the house is black and smelee

A abulenz came and the lade and me went to the haspital. The doktor and ners watched us. My mom and dad came and a fire man asked some kweschens mom told me to tell the truth.

i dont know why I have a xtra kromosom. The doktor says there are 1 in 1000 pepel like me. He also says Im not so smart as most pepel.



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May be im not be smart but I can see I look diferent than most pepel. I look like a chinezman. i know my liif will be difrent. i know i will not live as long as most pepel

Also my tung hangs from my mowf I cant see my balls. its hard to poop. I have lots of waks in my iers. I have one lien akros my hands The kids think thats kool

Every one reads better than me. even my little brother. Every one is better at sportz than me Even my little brother.

but i am better with my irish seter His name is king. i luv when he chases me and liks my face. In the morning i jump out of bed so we can play. i feed him i walk him. i clean up his poop. i like to hug him and he likes to falo me. i wish he could falo me every where

i also luv to make muzik. i sing play the peano gitar and drums. Pepel make funny faces when i play. When the windows are open our nabors komplain. at the toun muzik festuvul they let me stan on the end of the staj and make like i am in the band. but some times pepel get maed and dad tells me to moov.

I know my famle luv me. But they falo me every where. Even my little brother. They never leev me aloon. When they are not looking some times I like to run away.

I do not have frends. some times i play with my sister and brother frends. Some times the kids at school teeze me. They think I am a freek i do not kri. But I run away from them. It herts what they do. It herts that i am diferent . I have feelings and they hert.

i like my techers. They help me lern because i am spe-shel. At home my tutor mom and dad also help me lern.

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Soon i will grajuate from hiskool. i am nerves about what comes nekst. i am not smart for kalig. May be i can wash klooZ or clean tables like the pepel in toun who are like me do

I tok to my mom and dad about what I shud do. i do not want to live at home. i want to leev toun. Go far away. May be to china.

Rit now i am going to run away. We now live in a small hous and have problems with money because of me. i am always trobel. They are going to mis me.

i leev when the lade that wachs me is not waching. I can hier her yeling my name. Then i can hier my dad. Then my mom sister and brother. They keep walking and driving around trying to find me I moov away from their vois es.

I do not know where to go. may be kaleforna. i hiid in Mr shelbees shed. He will be mad if he finds me again insiid. He is not a niis man.

It is geting dark and cold. The shed has a wood stov. I put in some logs rool the newz paper and light it with a mach. O NO NOT NOT AGAIN

# Local Legend

---

Although he was a local legend in his own time, time and fate would not be kind to him. Football and hockey, playing and coaching, were his claim to fame. After leaving the sports arena, one venture led to another, restaurant and Bed & Breakfast owner to name two. He even tried his hand at becoming a tour guide of the town. No one knew the past of this historic town better than the Legend (as he was known among the locals), but there were not enough paying people for him to guide.

Both the town and Legend were in a funk. He tried his hand at politics and served one term as a town councilor. But his ideas became those of his fellow councilors and he often found himself on the wrong side of the political table. Finally, real estate sales made him a success. He was able to pay his mortgage, pay the bills and enjoy life.

There was always a cigarette in the Legend's mouth, except for the many times when he was eating or, even more often, drinking one of day's many alcoholic beverages. He was addicted to all three, and it showed. His once athletic physique had become a protruding belly, yellow teeth, yellow finger nails and a red-hued face. Many times he was badgered by loved ones to quit the alcohol and fags and to limit the food intake. Many times he tried and an equal number of times he failed. He knew his habits needed to change, but life was too enjoyable.

While he enjoyed life, his wife grew increasingly concerned about the fruits of his enjoyment. It was a second marriage for both, but this time they had found mates for life. But through the years, she had watched the Legend's weight increase as well as his consumption of alcohol and smoke. She told anyone and everyone who would listen that she was afraid that his habits were killing him and how would she support herself if he died.

Then, for reasons only known to him, came the day when he decided it was time to put those habits aside and his success was evident. But, after

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a “minor” bump on the head, his brain bled. For the first time, the Legend complained about a headache. Repeated visits to his doctor left him with the wrong diagnosis and treatment. Finally a radiographic test was ordered and the results caused the Legend to be rushed to the hospital.

The doctors drained the blood from his brain and sent him home. With one side of his head shaven and perforated, he looked like a character from a horror movie. But there was a smile on his face and humor spoken about losing weight the hard way.

Days later the headaches returned. More time at the hospital left the Legend with more holes in his head. He had lost more weight, but at a costly price. He felt relief and despair; both were justified.

More days later, more headaches again, but this time followed by slurred speech and loss of muscle movement. This would be his last trip to the hospital. He emerged from the surgery voluble and anxious. But the brain bled, he slipped into a coma and rested in peace.

The eulogies at the Legend’s memorial service brought much laughter and some tears. There was much about the man and his life that engendered smiles and sorrow. His travails, medical or otherwise, and fate became the talk of the town. Everyone had an opinion, medical or otherwise. Although his death was accidental, his lifestyle had been like a death wish. As he was laid to rest, the Legend was fondly remembered and pitied.

Everyone also pondered their own lifestyles, particularly what they put into their mouths, and their own mortality. But, after a week’s time, perhaps as a source of comfort, the pondering stopped and their hedonistic habits returned. Into those mouths copious amounts of alcohol, food and tobacco smoke flowed, unabated, again.

# The Comatose Bride

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The bride went into a coma the day of her wedding. It was her third marriage, the groom's fourth. He was a multi-millionaire and many years her senior. She was a former beauty queen and much more pleasing to the eye.

Because of her beauty, Bride could have worked nearly anywhere. She chose a center for the destitute addicted to drugs. She effortlessly moved between the worlds of the rich and famous and the deprived druggie.

Groom earned one of his many fortunes making drugs - the ethical kind - including one, ironically, for drug addiction. It was to be their first common denominator.

They had met at a party for the rich and beautiful; undoubtedly some were drug addicts, but they could afford their habits. It was not love at first sight for Bride. It took more than a year for her to acknowledge his ardor and accept his proposal of marriage, which came a week after he had first laid eyes on her. And during that interim year, Bride and her dog, Mathilde, moved in with Groom.

That year passed quickly. First they poked and probed each other's defenses and later their personalities and passions. But finally, they found mutual love and respect. Word of the wedding was announced and the invitations conveyed via post.

It was to be an intimate, but lavish, affair, with a few friends and relatives in attendance. Mathilde was to be the ring bearer but, sadly, a week before the nuptials, she suddenly and mysteriously died.

All were gathered at the ceremony when Bride unceremoniously slipped into unconsciousness. All week she had complained of a fever, aches, chills and a severe headache. Despite it all, now including an unsightly papular rash, she insisted that all would be well. Instead, to everyone's horror, she was on an air ambulance to the local hospital.

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Groom was quite familiar with hospitals, especially this one. He had earned a medical degree but had decided he could earn more money as an entrepreneurial businessman. He had once lost control of his then sporty and speedy automobile on a notoriously dangerous curve near his home. The medevac helicopter had rushed him to the same hospital where Bride now lay.

Notwithstanding all the tests and consultations, the doctors were without a diagnosis and consequently without an effective treatment. Bride plummeted into a coma and was not expected to live - despite all the monitors attached to and needles inserted into her.

Perhaps in desperation, Groom's dormant medical training prompted him to inquire about Mathilde's cause of death. After a few hours and many phone calls, her veterinarian told him that it was Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. *Rickettsia rickettsii* is a mighty sickening little bugger.

Groom and the doctors knew that this bacteria is zoonotic. And, although comas were uncommon, in retrospect, Bride was symptomatic. Doxycycline saved her life.

Bride and Groom exchanged their vows.

## Two Children, Two Tales

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The year was 1977 and airline hijackings were becoming increasingly common, particularly on flights involving Israel. My wife, three-month-old son and I, were at Ben Gurion Airport, bound for Belgium via Charles De Gaulle airport. In a curtained cubicle, the airport security agent devoted nearly an entire hour to sifting through our past, luggage and son's diaper.

Unlike at most other airports, we were transported by bus to our El Al jet located in the middle of a remote tarmac. We were instructed to board as rapidly as possible. Bullets and bombs were always a threat.

After we reached cruising altitude, one of the flight attendants gleefully told us that many of the elderly passengers wanted to know if our neonate was a boy or a girl. His mother replied and the flight attendant immediately marched down the aisle snapping his fingers and singing "It's a boy, it's a boy."

For the remainder of that five hour flight, our son enjoyed the lavished attentions of one "grandparent" after another. My wife and I enjoyed some well-deserved sleep.

### Thirty Two Years Later

Except for the deafening sounds of the police helicopters overhead, Jerusalem's King David Street in the Old City is quiet. There has been more civil unrest and protests from the Palestinians. Stones are being cast and tires burned outside this ancient Holy City's walls. Inside the walls, shopkeepers have few tourists to solicit.

Suddenly there is a flurry of activity. A teary-eyed and distraught blond-haired, blue-eyed six-year-old girl has become separated from her mother. The Palestinian shopkeepers immediately come to console her.

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The most paternal looking amongst them, familiar with the girl's native language, comforts and assures her that all will be well.

She tells the incredulous shopkeeper that her mother went off towards Jaffa gate in search of her errant older brother. Hand-in-hand the two marched off in that direction. No sooner had they turned the corner than the mother and brother appeared from the opposite direction.

Via the shopkeepers' vocal relay, the girl, and her guide are summoned back to their point of origin whereupon mother and daughter are tearfully reunited.

As the family continued their stroll down David Street, shopkeepers along the way cheered, smiled, clapped their hands and patted the girl on the head. All was well.

Two lighthearted tales of two children who, albeit briefly, visited the turbulent "Holy Land" and who then safely returned home. But what is to become of the children who call that Land home?



# It's Black and White

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Once upon a time in the future, situated somewhere in these United States of America, a white man points a gun at a black man. They speak these words:

White Man (White): Hands up. This is a stick up.

Black Man (Black): What a droll cliché. Are you serious?

White: Yea, I am serious. What's a cliché?

Black: It means overused and lacking originality. Are you next going to tell me "your money or your life"?

White: Well, ha, ha, what's your life worth?

Black: It is beyond measure. What about yours?

White: Mister, don't make me angry. What's in your wallet?

Black: Not enough to make it worth the risk you are taking. What's in your wallet?

White: Nothing, thanks to you people.

Black: My people? Is that what led you to a life of crime?

White: It's because of you uppity blacks that just want to keep us poor white people down so that you can get more rich. It's people like you that put me in the poor house. I want my share. I want my payback.

Black: Stop your whining. If you want your share, earn it, do not steal it. As for your payback, are you willing to pay the price?

White: Don't know. What I do know is that you people think you own this country, just because you run the government

## George Francis Reid

and the companies. There was a time, you know, when we whites did that.

Black: And you made such a hash of the job.

White: Hash?

Black: Messed up.

White: Yea, well, all of you should go back to Africa where you came from.

Black: Using that logic, perhaps we should all return to Africa, including you.

White: What do you mean? My family came from somewhere in Europe.

Black: So it would appear. However, their earliest ancestors came from Africa, the cradle of humanity. And, they were black. Just like me.

White: What, you're telling me that my first relatives were black? You're lying.

Black: Oops, your ignorance is showing. It is a scientific fact. Originally, we were all from Africa, black and related.

White: No way. Look at the color of my skin and eyes. You and I are not kin.

Black: Looks can be deceiving. The truth is in our genes.

White (facetiously searching through his pants pockets): Our jeans? Now how do I find the truth in something I am wearing?

Black: Ah, a touch of humor. Your genetic material. No matter, that is the reality.

White: You're lying.

Black (with a sigh): You know, your gun looks like it is getting weighty. And, as much as I have enjoyed enlightening you, I am growing weary of this conversation. Goodbye.

White: One more step and I will shoot.

## **Just Enough Words**

Black: Do that. But just remember, you will be killing one of your kin.

# HOMOS CURE CANCER

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“HOMOS CURE CANCER” declared the headline in the Gillespie Gazette.

The article reported: In a press conference this morning, Dr. Wilde, of the Alexander Medical School, announced the startling discovery that hemopoietic stem cells transplanted from homosexuals of either gender into cancer patients is curative. Dr. Wilde stated, “For reasons we do not understand, compared to cells from heterosexual donors, cells from homosexuals significantly reduced the risk of life-threatening graft-versus-host disease and increased the graft-versus-tumor effect. Consequently, instead of having unacceptably low cure rates, we can now essentially cure the patient of hematopoietic and lymphoid malignancies.”

This announcement left the oncology medical community scratching their heads as they scurried to the microphones, telephones and computers. There were editorials in the medical journals; prominent physicians pontificated. They all anxiously awaited the publication of the data.

Medical meetings were hastily convened to discuss Dr. Wilde’s findings and its prospects and implications (e.g. would the stem cells from either transsexual or transgender donors also be curative?). Outside the meetings, demonstrations were mounted for and against the use of “homo cells.” Everyone was feverish.

Elsewhere, pundits on both ends of the political and religious spectrum, weighed in with their well-worn perspectives. And, the government health authorities began re-evaluating their bans on homosexual bone marrow and blood donations.

Dr. Laughton, the Chief Medical Officer of the Church of the True Bible Believers Hospital Association, stated that he did not believe the blasphemous findings and that, in accordance with church doctrine, under no circumstances would homosexuals be donors in any of its hospitals.

## Just Enough Words

Dr. Straight, of the Global Gay Physicians Organization, hailed the announcement as a pioneering achievement. Ms. Toklas, of the Worldwide Lesbian and Gay Association, stated that they are not surprised by these findings and that the homosexual community should use this discovery to leverage equal rights for people of their sexual orientation.

### TWO MONTHS LATER

“GRAND APOSTLE HAS CANCER” declared the headline in the Gillespie Gazette.

The article disclosed that Church of the True Bible Believers spokesman, Evangelist Milk, announced today that their omniscient leader, Grand Apostle Rohm, has been stricken with cancer, multiple myeloma. He also stated that while the prognosis is not good, the doctors are optimistic.

In reaction to the announcement, crowds have congregated at Saint Erasmus Square in a show of support. Vigils and special masses are being held around the globe. Thousands of homosexuals, religious and non-religious alike, have offered to donate their cells to Rohm, an avowed homophobe.

### ONE MONTH LATER

“GRAND APOSTLE LEAVES FOR TREATMENT” stated the headline in the Gillespie Gazette.

The article reported: Church of the True Bible Believers spokesman, Evangelist Milk, announced today that Grand Apostle Rohm has left for treatment in an undisclosed location. He declined to comment as to whether the Grand Apostle would be receiving a hemopoietic stem cell transplant and if the donor would be a homosexual.

### ONE YEAR LATER

“GRAND APOSTLE IS CURED” declared the headline in the Gillespie Gazette.

The article disclosed that Church of the True Bible Believers spokesman, Evangelist Milk, announced today that doctors have declared Grand

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Apostle Rohm is free of his cancer. Evangelist Milk went on to state that a special service would be held throughout the world to celebrate this miracle. He also confirmed that the Grand Apostle had undergone a hemopoietic stem cell transplant, but steadfastly refused to comment about whether the donor was a homosexual.

### TWO YEARS LATER

“NOBEL PRIZE AWARDED FOR HOMO CANCER CURE DISCOVERY” stated the headline in the Gillespie Gazette.

The article reported that Dr. Wilde received this year’s award for his life saving discovery. He was quoted as saying, “I still do not know how it works, but God bless the homosexuals.”

### ONE YEAR LATER

“MISSISSIPPI IS THE LAST TO GIVE HOMOS RIGHTS” declared the headline in the Gillespie Gazette.

The article reported: Today Mississippi became the last state to repeal their anti-same-sex marriage statute. After signing the measure (with a visibly unsteady hand) Governor Bernstein stated that, while he is personally opposed to this change because it defies the will of the Lord, it is the will, however misguided, of the people.

# Therapeutic Golf

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He was nearing the end of another frustrating golf season. He had thought that if he joined this exclusive and expensive country club it would improve his game - lessons were for losers.

The morning was damp and chilly. His first swing of the day landed the ball into the closest pond. He smashed his driver into the ground, then returned it to its assigned place in the golf bag and stridently marched to that water hazard and glared into its depths. Instead of taking the penalty, he considered trying to hit that ball.

Instead, with a primal, bloodcurdling scream, he lifted his bag and hurled it into that water hole. Then with a sense of satisfaction, he turned around and headed for the club house.

About halfway to his destination, he suddenly stopped, growled, stared at the ground, then the sky, turned around and returned to that repository of his clubs, and ball. With steely determination, he gingerly walked into the black aqua hole and retrieved the bag and clubs - but not his nemesis - the ball.

He dumped out the water from the bag and triumphantly marched back in the direction of the clubhouse. But just as he approached the door, he stopped, stared at the door knob and then at the sky and, without a word, reversed his route and, again, threw the bag and clubs into that pond.

Without any hesitation, facial expression or utterance, he bypassed the club house, went directly to his car and sped away. He never looked back - and never returned.

# Mysteries and Other Tales of the Town

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A small cargo ship lies at anchor in the town harbor and it is a mystery why it never moves. Unlike other ships, this one does not even flee south for the winter. Some locals will explain that the vessel's owner purchased it with a full tank of fuel and is simply being frugal, a common practice in these parts. Others say he does not have a pilot's license and so cannot set sail.

The origin of the owner is also a mystery. Rumors abound. Some say he is a Turk, others an Arab and still others a South African. The rumors can only agree that he is dark-skinned. The rumors also agree that a wife and child live aboard and that the man beats his wife, will soon be deported and is going to flee. But still, the ship mysteriously never moves.

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Why would a man with a fully functional car insist on riding his horse through the local drive-in eatery's food pickup line, leaving horse droppings along the way? Surely the owner knows that the horse is long in the tooth and that the clomping of his hooves on the pavement is not good for his feet. But each day he collects the food he purchased and the horse leaves some droppings.

The man was warned and cited many times by various members of the local constabulary. The local magistrate even threatened him with incarceration. But the threats fell on deaf ears and the man, on his trusty steed, stubbornly continued to violate the law. So the law sent him to the local lockup for 60 days. On the 61<sup>st</sup> day, he and the horse returned to the eatery. Everyone in town wonders why the law just doesn't ban him from having horses.

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## Just Enough Words

A neighbor purchased at auction a car identical to the one he already owned. Except, this car never leaves his driveway. He cared for the car, even doted over it, but it never left the same spot. Could the reason for the car's immobility be similar to that of the mystery ship? Unlikely, claimed the rumor mongers; the neighbor was not dark-skinned. Let's find out.

One day, as I walked past his house, the neighbor whispered, with a gleam in his eyes, "Would you like to see something special?" My imagination conjured up many possibilities and so he had my curiosity. Together we strolled over to the motionless twin car. He opened the boot of the car and showed me several dozen rolls of toilet paper that he had recently purchased "for next to nothing" at an auction. My curiosity was sated, my education expanded. I had learned that toilet paper, at least in large quantities, could be purchased at auction for next to nothing.

As we were on the topic of auctions and next to the auctioned car, I took the opportunity to inquire why he had made such an unusual purchase. The gleam returned to his eyes and, with another whisper of a secret to share, he told me, "For the spare parts." His original car was always in need of repairs and now he had all the parts that he needed and at a cost of next to nothing. His reasoning seemed bizarrely reasonable.

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Not all ships and cars are immobile in this town. One seemed to never stop. The owners and drivers of this machine in seemingly ceaseless motion were a new couple and their neonate. Day and night they could be seen driving the town's streets. They never violated any traffic laws, except to slowly roll through the stop signs, and they avoided the town's only traffic light. They looked exhausted but serene. This daily routine became the talk of the town and was so strange as to be beyond speculation.

Then one day the mystery was solved. One of their neighbors witnessed the parents racing from the house carrying their screaming baby. The neighbor grew concerned, but not for long. The parents hastily secured the child to its car seat, leaped into the car and slowly drove away. With the car in motion, the baby instantly stopped screaming and the parents' exhausted, but serene, facial expressions returned. As word spread, the entire town was relieved.

## George Francis Reid

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Another mystery was the woman in town who became more ill every time she visited a doctor. It all began when she complained about an aching back. Her family physician prescribed a pill. But the pain persisted and as more doctors treated her, the more ailments she accumulated. In addition to her backache, she had, in chronological order: nausea and vomiting, dizziness, a dry mouth and metallic taste, a rash, urinary retention and constipation and, finally, insomnia.

In desperation, she finally insisted that her husband drive her to the big city to visit a famous specialist. The doctor, known like no other to solve medical mysteries, listened to her complaints and then asked only one question: how many different medications was she taking? After a moment's recollection and the use of her fingers, she replied "28." The famous specialist advised her that if she discarded all of them, in short time all her ailments would become only a memory. She did; they did.

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A new family has joined our town and they have made their presence known. Soon after unpacking, they opened the house windows and the music within radiated out to the annoyance of everyone within earshot. It was particularly irksome to the innkeeper down the road. It offended his sense of decent music and, much to his consternation, also his guests.

Being a reasonable man, he thought he could reason with his new neighbors. The discussion ended with much yelling, cursing and threats. Complaints to the local constable fell on deaf ears. There were no town ordinances that prohibited sharing their music with the neighborhood.

Since reason and the law would not prevail, the innkeeper decided to retaliate. It was time for a tit for tat. He purchased a powerful sound system, selected music that was bound to annoy them and directed his onslaught towards their house. It was war.

As any reasonable person would have expected, the neighbors cranked up the volume of their music and the battle of the bands began. It was this cacophony of noise that brought the constable to their doorsteps. He

## Just Enough Words

confiscated both of the music machines and, in no uncertain terms, told them to behave. Silence returned, except for the neighborhood's sighs of relief.

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Not all bizarre beings in town are bipeds; there is Max the English Bulldog. He is impervious to pain, infections, sadistic children and much more. He revels in being flung by the neck by our Doberman. On midwinter days, you could see our dog bounding over the snow like a deer, while Max, at almost the same speed, would burrow through the snow like a hyper-energetic groundhog.

Max's favorite past time is chewing. Left to his own devices, nearly any inanimate object can become victim to his jaws. The standard fare, gigantic raw-hide chew bones are devoured in minutes, cinder blocks in hours and metallic downspouts within days. Max would make the perfect junk yard dog.

But if you visit our town and are chatting with one of the local denizens as Max waddles past, the story they will tell you about him is none that this tale teller has told. It will be about one hot summer day when Max was found drinking an entire bucket of aqua blue paint. And then returned home to eat dinner.

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Someone stole the heating oil from one of the townsfolk's storage tank. Victim was furious and irrational. Town gossip told him that the same thing had happened to one of his neighbors and a church near his home.

In his state of unceasing fury, his irrational judgment convinced him that the thief must be the local oil delivery man. After all, he delivered the oil to all three locations and would have known when the tanks were full. Victim complained to the local constable and demanded his money be returned by the oil company. His complain and demand were rebuffed.

The next day, Victim learned from his neighbor that no oil had been stolen from his home and that such an act would be near impossible since his oil tank is located in the basement. Further inquiry told him that the oil

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had also not been stolen from the church. Town gossip was rarely reliable. Victim was no closer to catching the culprit.

Then one day, while driving around the town, Victim encountered a suspicious-looking truck. It was outfitted with two large tanks on each side, did not have a license plate and the driver looked like a thief. He followed the truck, at a distance where he thought he would not be noticed, out of town to an isolated farm house. He would later learn that the house was rented, making the driver (aka Thief) all the more suspicious.

Convinced that he had found the culprit, Victim raced back to town and laid out all the evidence to the local constable. Victim was flabbergasted when the constable refused to arrest or even question Thief. It was time for Victim to take matters into his own hands.

The next day, he staked out the farm and waited to catch Thief stealing more fuel. Hours later the truck emerged, but this time Thief had a passenger. Victim followed them for several miles to a truck rental agency. Passenger rented a large truck and, in their respective vehicles, they were back on the road. This was sinister.

Victim followed them back to their farm and, as the hour was getting late, he decided to return in the morning. Alas, with his return he found the farm abandoned. No Thief, no Passenger, no culprits. Case closed.

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There is a lad in town who solved a mystery that transpired within his own home. Each day he would return from school to find his mother speaking to his maternal grandmother. He was always mystified how they could find a hour, or more, of topics to discuss each day. He was even more mystified that his mother always seemed to be doing all the talking, being that his grandmother was also an unceasing chatterbox and, although slightly deaf, not a good listener. So the lad decided to investigate.

Next day, after school, and for two days thereafter, he went to his grandmother's house and found her incessantly taking to his mother, stopping only to take a breath. Having witnessed his mother's garrulous disposition and knowing that she had inherited her mother's inability to listen to others, although she was not even slightly deaf, the lad had a hypothesis. The investigation continued.

## Just Enough Words

The next day he returned home from school to find his mother talking, and not listening, to grandma on the phone. As fast as his little legs would carry him, he ran upstairs into his parents' bedroom and slowly lifted the hand piece of the phone. He quietly smiled. The mystery had been solved. Both his mother and grandmother were simultaneously speaking and neither was listening.

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Why would anyone, especially someone in their remarkably senior years, walk in the middle of the town streets? His gait was hesitant, his stops frequent and his stoops to regain his strength and breath often. Some cars would try to pass around him. Some would honk at him. Some would do both. This was his morning routine - walking right in the middle of the street.

Some mornings I would briefly join him for part of his daily constitutional. Our routine consisted of me yelling to be heard and him cupping his right ear. His pace was even slower than usual because he could not concurrently walk and talk. His talk was always about his frustration that the "government" would not renew his driver's license. His frustration was only the greater as he had worked for them for 40 years repairing their roads. He always concluded by announcing that he just celebrated his eighty-second birthday.

One day the walk and talk was interrupted by the local constable blocking our path with his ancient patrol car. He emerged from the vehicle, steadied his legs and strolled up for a conversation.

He yelled to my deaf walking companion that he had received more complaints about his middle-of-the-road slogs and that they all feared that he would be struck by a car. The constable warned him about the risks and the birthday boy nodded.

As the constable was returning to his car, the aged plodder yelled out asking for a ride to his destination. The constable nodded and helped his doddering passenger into the patrol car. As the car moved away, the human traffic hazard turned around, waved and smiled with a great sense of satisfaction.

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Some days later the constable and I crossed paths. In passing, I commented how nice it was that he had given the man of senior years a ride. He laughed, shook his head and explained that it was a daily routine. Walking away, he also commented that he was cheaper than hiring a taxi.

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When peering out my kitchen window, one of the most fascinating things to observe is Clarence, our neighbor's young Siamese cat, on one of his hunting expeditions. For some curious reason, half the time he executes an attack he misses his mark by inches.

The objective can be anything, large or small, animate or inanimate, mobile or merely shaking, the outcome is the same. His plan of attack appears feline and predatory. He will crouch down to the ground and with his tail twitching, he will incrementally crawl towards his prey and pounce. The results are the same; 50% of the time he is off target.

It was on one sunny day that a very vocal bluejay was perched on the lower branch of the chestnut tree in our backyard. The cat was sitting on our picnic table and planning his attack on the unsuspecting bird. With ferocity the cat swiftly leaped - with all four legs splayed and claws fully extended - towards the trunk of the tree. But instead, he flew past the tree and landed on the ground. Bewildered by these events, he shook his head, walked up to the tree and sharpened his claws. I was as bewildered as the cat.

Later that week, while chatting with Clarence's owner, the quasi-hunter himself appeared by my side, rubbed against my legs and gave me the unmistakable howl of the Siamese breed. I picked him up and immediately noticed something funny about his crystal blue eyes - they were extremely crossed.

With a gleeful laugh that surprised my neighbor, I realized that I had solved the mystery of her cat's poor hunting prowess. He had diplopia and therefore saw both a virtual and real image of his target. Half the time what he attacked was not real.

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## Just Enough Words

In our town also resides a handyman who is prone to self-inflicted injury. In his hands, a simple screw driver leaves him bloody. A hammer in his right hand leaves his left thumb battered and bruised. This, of course, is the reason he finally decided to purchase a nail gun.

He was always mistrustful of new and expensive gadgets but thought, in his hands, a hammer was a dangerous weapon. After a trip to the local hardware store and some very vague instructions from the salesperson, he was anxious to gun some nails into wood. He was never one to read an instruction manual, particularly the safety warnings written by some lawyer.

He drove over to a house that he was renovating, hauled out the nail gun and the large, heavy compressor that made the newfangled thing work. He set up the system, inserted a cartridge of nails and placed a two-by-four of wood across his lap. The first nail he shot grazed his thumb. The second grazed his scrotum. How was he going to explain that to his wife? On his third attempt the nail struck home. He had mastered the nail gun.

It was then that he became curious about whether he could shoot a nail into a similar piece of wood that was not near his body; he reasoned it reduced the risk of injury. So, as he liked to experiment, he carefully aimed the nail gun at a wall stud located ten feet away. With the trigger pressed, the nail left the gun, ricocheted off the wall, bounced up off the floor and into his left knee. It missed his arthritic right knee. He was shocked. He was in pain.

The emergency room physician removed the nail, sutured his knee, put an antiseptic on his scrotum and prescribed antibiotics along with generous amounts of pain relievers. His wife returned the nail gun.

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Why was a portable commode placed alongside a row of the town's park benches? Speculation abounds.

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Like the water along its shores, the town will continue to have its ebbs and flows. The town will also continue to have its mysteries and tales.

Stand by.

## The Woman in Bay Ten

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That night it was well below freezing. Inside the Emergency Department, it was warm, parched and, despite the glare from the fluorescent lights, there was gloom in the air.

On such nights, if space was available, the local homeless were permitted a respite from this weather. But for the woman in Bay Ten, it was neither weather nor destitution that brought her to the ER.

She was emaciated, had rectal bleeding, felt constantly nauseous and complained of severe abdominal pain. The radiology report read that she had a massive bowel obstruction, colon cancer. The ER doctor thought it a miracle that she was still alive. Surgery that night was warranted and, after he first dispatched with some of this evening's other transients, he would speak with her.

The occupant of Bay Two insisted on depositing the results of his hacking, phlegmy sputum, onto the floor rather than into the conveniently located pan. A friendly, but firm, reprimand redirected his aim.

The patient in Bay Five, with a history of cardiac arrhythmias, was a regular at the ER because she could not afford the medication. With a broad smile, the doctor gave her a handful of drug company samples and reminded her to follow the instructions.

Next was the woman in Bay Seven, a regular at the ER on nights such as this, who was vociferously complaining about her cold bedpan. He gently reminded her that they do not warm up the pans and wished her a good night's rest.

The woman in Bay Ten, like all of the patients that night, was dressed in a revealing hospital gown and was supposed to be asleep on one of the uncomfortable gurneys surrounded by portable curtains. But, despite the intra-venous analgesics, the pain prevented such relief - and besides the



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staff was too loud and boisterous. She knew that she should be worried, yet was too weary, physically and emotionally, to care.

With nothing to knock upon, the doctor slowly pulled back one of the curtains and introduced himself. Standing alongside the gurney with his arms wrapped around his clipboard, he gently asked the woman in Bay Ten how she was feeling. In a muted voice, she politely stated that her hearing was impaired and to please speak more loudly. For the remainder of the conversation, she whispered, he shouted - for all to hear.

Doctor: I have received the results from your radiology tests and I am sorry to tell you that it looks like you have colon cancer. Although at this time it is difficult to tell, it appears to be quite advanced.

Woman: I see.

Doctor: I have conferred with colleagues and, given the urgency of your situation, we recommend that you have surgery as soon as possible. Tonight would be best.

Woman: I understand.

Doctor: Do you have any questions?

Woman: No.

Doctor: Your admissions form does not designate a contact person. Do you have anyone you would like us to notify?

Woman: No.

Doctor: No one?!

Woman: No.

Doctor: OK. Your form also indicates that you have lived in this town your entire life and that you were an elementary school teacher. Surely there must be a relative or friend?

Woman (after a brief pause): No.

Hours later, an orderly appeared and drew back one of the curtains. With a minimum number of spoken words, he unlocked the gurney's

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wheels and rolled the woman out of Bay Ten. As she was transported down the hall, that nights fellow patients somberly acknowledged her misfortune. The staff did the same.

At the end of her journey stood the doctor. He gently covered her left hand with his and mouthed the words, "Be well." She nodded an appreciation.

A few steps later, with a hiss, the glass doors slid open and the woman formerly of Bay Ten was rolled into her unknown - alone.

# Boy Versus Beast

---

The household was in havoc, but Boy wanted a dog. Along with a new mother and new baby, the family had just moved into a new town, and Boy needed a pal. After much discussion and emotion, the parents agreed, provided that Boy would take complete responsibility for feeding, exercising, scooping-up-after and training the dog, aka Beast.

At two months of age, Beast was compact, cute and cuddly. He was easy to manage and Boy and Beast became best friends and constant companions; Boy's bed was Beast's bed. They would walk through the town and the children would flock to play with Beast - and Boy. Both were happy.

But within months Beast was much bigger than Boy and difficult to control. His teeth were chewing everything: furniture, books, clothing and toys - always Boy's favorite toys. Beast also decided that there was little reason for him to relieve himself outdoors; after all, the scent of his waste was already indoors. For Boy, it was no longer fun being with Beast. Besides, he now had many human friends. The less time Boy spent with Beast, the more the creature lived up to his name.

The father, a man of the cloth, was away most days and many nights. The new mother was coping with her new baby. Beast was becoming more incorrigible and an ultimatum was laid before Boy. He was reminded that Beast was his responsibility and, if Beast could not be controlled, he would need a new home. Something had to be done.

Boy often visited the library; it was both his sanctuary and a house of knowledge. There he found a book, written by a group of monks, that offered him wise words about how to obedience-train Beast. Boy had found salvation.

He bought a training collar and leash. He commanded Beast to heel, come, sit and stay. And, if Beast was willing, he would obey. Most often he

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was unwilling. Boy would give a command, repeatedly, and it was ignored. It was becoming an epic test of wills.

During training, Beast would drag Boy around the town, even through traffic. Boy would direct him to heel in one direction and Beast would pull him in another. It was a tug of war. If Boy tried to discipline him with a “NO!”, Beast would pull him to the ground by his pant leg.

Ignoring the advice of the monks, in desperation, Boy tried training him with treats. But soon Beast had Boy well trained and was being well “treated.” The dog had become intolerable - and chubby. It was back to the monks’ book.

The monks wrote that, when working with a dog, the trainer needed to be patient, yet consistent and firm. So Boy continued to give the commands heel, come, sit and stay. Beast consistently and firmly disobeyed.

The monks wrote that the dog’s owner needed to establish a rapport with the dog and maintain a stream of communication. But it was Beast who did the communicating.

One day, as Boy was collecting the training collar and leash for another futile lesson, Beast sauntered up carrying a book that was torn to shreds. Boy disciplined him with yet another “NO!” and pried the book loose from Beast’s mouth.

As the book fell to the floor, Boy read “The Simple and Successful Path to Training Your Puppy, by The Buddhists Monks of Nunapitchuk.”

## Billy Versus Harry

---

The goat was supposed to be a duck. The duck was supposed to be a gift for my mate. But when I saw the young goat - with his pathetic limp - bleating for help, he became the gift.

The limp was rendered by a demented dog that had chewed on the goat's leg, tearing tendons that healed too short for his growing leg. So, the quasi-quadruped was handicapped by a limp and a fear of dogs.

The veterinarian straighten his leg. Unfortunately, despite suffering much pain from the process, the limp remained. And so it was, limp and all, that Billy joined our menagerie of 35 cats, a rabbit, a chicken and 13 dogs.

Our pack of Doberman Pinschers and German Shepherds quickly sensed that the new kid on the block was petrified of them. They surrounded him, they barked at him and they snapped at his heels. Billy could not limp away fast enough.

As with any pack of animals, there was a leader and an intimidator. Harry, large and the product of too much inbreeding, was both and he had found a new quarry. Unlike his pack mates, he constantly stared at Billy and patiently waited for the poor goat to relax before he attacked. Never with the intent to kill or maim - just to intimidate.

While we were away, the dogs were kenneled and Billy stayed in the barn with Chicken - the fowl fellow that plagued my mate with daily pecks her on the legs. It was a regular routine. My mate and I would return from work, Chicken would suddenly appear at the barn door and the race would start. Would my mate get into the house before he could attack her legs? For my mate, venturing outside the house necessitated dousing Chicken with water from the garden hose.

One frigid winter day Chicken went missing. We were concerned, more than my mate, that the cats had killed him. Instead, I discovered him in our sheltered porch, perched on top of a large pile of cats, sleeping in

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their mutual warmth. There he stood, proud, defiant and ready to protect the cats. The inhabitants of our farm, including we humans, could keep an animal behaviorist busy for a very long time.

Back to Billy's sad state of affairs.

I had an ulterior motive for bringing Billy to the farm, and it was not going according to plan. I had thought that his grazing would keep the grass short so that I would not have to labor with the lawn mower. But came the spring, the grass sprung tall and ubiquitous and Billy's belly bloated. Despite his heroic efforts, he could not meet the challenge - and I cut the grass.

The spring and its warmth also liberated Billy from the shelter of the barn. He felt free to roam and munch on the grass. But that is not all he ate. That spring, the only flowers that bloomed were located beyond Billy's reach and the mail from our roadside postal box went missing. The farm had become a horticulturist's nightmare and the vendors refused to believe that our resident even-toed ungulate was the reason for their unpaid bills.

The dog days of summer brought extreme heat and humidity. Harry, perpetually panting, focused his dogged determination on tormenting Billy. Throughout the day, we could hear the relentless sounds of Harry barking followed immediately by Billy bleating and his collared cow bell ringing as he tried to flee. How much more torment could the kid tolerate?

Then one day, from the back of the barn, those familiar sounds were replaced by Billy's bell ringing, a loud thump and yipes from Harry. I arrived at the scene to find Billy with his head in the position of a charging bull and Harry staggering and gasping for breath. Billy had butted Harry into the barn wall.

In the days that followed, the usual rhythmic sequential sounds of barks, bleats and cow bells ringing ceased. Billy had beaten Harry. Billy, the former caprine coward, became the king of the canines.

# My Home, My Land, My Country

---

With our betrayers' signatures on the Munich Agreement, it was only a brief six months till the Germans occupied the country of my birth. First, with cheers from its citizens, fell Austria. Then, under the pretense that we were abusing their ethnic Germans, the Sudetenland was occupied. By March of 1939, Hitler stood at Prague Castle and claimed Czechoslovakia for Germany.

As I listened to that madman, I instantly knew that we Jews would not survive his tyranny. With the collaboration of Ferdinand Peroutka and other anti-Semites, only evil would come to our people. With money from the signatory nations that betrayed us, the panicked exodus of Jews for Palestine, the United States, South America and, stupidly, Poland began. Although I was not a Zionist, I chose Palestine.

I begged my parents, other relatives and friends to escape with me. Sadly my pleas fell on deaf or delusional ears. At the hands of Eichmann, his henchman at the Reich Security Main Office and others, they were all transported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto and later, notwithstanding all the German propaganda to the contrary, onto the death camps to perish.

With the sun rising over its horizon, the sight of Haifa from the decks of our cramped steamship gave me a feeling of security and destiny. I was home. As we were not legally bound for the Promised Land, we did not make port, but instead furtively rowed to the beach south of the city. It was an inauspicious beginning.

I worked as a stevedore at the docks where I was originally not permitted to land. With the urge to fight and the prospect of nationhood before us, I joined the Haganah. With the arrival of Independence and war, the Haganah became the Israel Defense Force and I became a sergeant.

We were few against their many, but we prevailed. Near the time of the truce, my orders were to "evacuate" the Palestinians from a strategically

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important village. We entered at early dawn while they were still asleep. I broke into a home to find the owner shielding his wife and son in the corner of the bedroom. Gesturing with my bayoneted rifle and yelling incomprehensible halting Hebrew, I ordered them from their home. As they passed me, the man's eyes radiated hate, the wife's tears and the child's an undefined glare. I will never forget that young boy's eyes. Again with my weapon, I prodded them onto the road and in the direction of the other fleeing refugees.

I returned to that house after the war was won. Like the others in the village, the house was uninhabited. Circumstances had prevented the family from returning. I claimed it as mine - the spoils of war. The new Israeli government readily issued me a deed. I owned it legally.

I felt no qualms or guilt about this decision. I know that these Palestinians occupied this land long after we were forced to leave by the Romans. But these are an uncivilized people that live no differently than their animals. They have shown no effort to improve themselves. They are neither enterprising nor well cultured like us Europeans. They do not deserve to live on this land. Besides, they can go anywhere.

I removed and burned the few furnishings they had owned, scrubbed the house clean and moved what few belongings I had into my new home. I started a garden, growing vegetables of the European variety. I trimmed the trees in the neglected orchard and founded herds of goats and sheep. I was a man of the land.

Some years later, I took a wife. She was a refugee from Poland and of good peasant stock. The following year our son was born and a family was formed. During that time, I also expanded the size of the house, gardens, orchards and herds. Life was good - almost.

With everything that I had I should have been a happy man, but, under orders from their Egyptian masters, the puppet Palestinians relentlessly terrorized us and my days started with an ill feeling of trepidation.

During the short seven years after we became a nation, there were too many attacks, and too many Israelis that died at the hands of the fedayeen. A 19-year-old girl was killed in Jerusalem, a farming community near Lod was attacked, a woman and her baby were killed in their home in Yehud, 11 passengers on a bus from Eilat to Tel Aviv were murdered (the killers spat



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on their bodies), grenades were tossed at a wedding in Patish (one woman was killed and 18 wounded), three children were killed and five wounded in Shafir by gunmen shooting into a synagogue - nothing is sacred to them.

There were additional killings in Beit Ovid, Ashkelon, Ramat Rachel, Aminadav, Sdom, Neve Hadassah and more. I did not think it would ever stop and we felt helpless, like lambs to the slaughter.

Of course the Israeli Defense Force mounted reprisals against these monsters and the fighting escalated. They were all called operations and had names like El-Hamma, Shoshana, Black Arrow (where both Egyptian and Israeli soldiers died); Elkayam, Jonathon, Volcano, more soldiers on both sides died; Salir, Gulliver, Lulav, Samaria and more. The toll, both civilian and military, amounted to hundreds of Israeli and thousands of Arabs. But still the terror continued. This was not the land of milk and honey. This was not the way to lead a life.

I surrendered to the terrorists. I decided to leave the country that had embraced me. We sold our lovely home and the land that I nurtured. As we passed through the threshold of our front door, my wife cried, my son was apprehensive of what was to come and I was full of hatred. With what few possessions we could carry, we walked to the bus stop for the trip to Haifa and the ship beyond.

First the Statue of Liberty and then my sponsor welcomed us to America. I was glad to be off the boat; I was uncertain about America. But, I was told that it is the land of opportunity and that with hard work and some chutzpah anyone could be a success.

Life in New York was difficult. Housing was crowded, the streets noisy and the people rude. I labored as a construction worker for 30 years. Then, in rapid succession, my wife died, my son planted me in a senior residence and my health deteriorated.

S. Aboussouan, M.D. was printed on the name tag of the Emergency Department physician that attended to my chest pains. He poked and prodded me, carefully reviewed the monitors and asked several questions, some personal. I told him about my flight from Czechoslovakia, my life in Israel, particularly the lovely home and village where I had lived. Suddenly his face contorted and I remembered those eyes.

## Marvin and Molly

---

For more than 60 years, they loved, cherished and were devoted to each other - and were separable. In spite of all that, insidiously, Marvin's rheumatoid arthritis and Molly's Alzheimer's disease made their relocation to the Manor inescapable, to separate wings, divided by a locked door.

The walls of their respective rooms, his with a roommate, hers without, were adorned with the same photos of them together. Their most treasured was of her in a wedding gown and him in military uniform. Others included them at home and on vacations, always together. Marvin, even with his thick eyeglasses, could barely see the photos anymore. Molly, who did not need spectacles, sometimes could not remember the occasion.

Because of their separation, Marvin, and when she could remember, Molly, would look forward to their daily walks and talks together. Sometimes they would talk about life in the Manor, but more often the topic was their past. Marvin had been a school bus driver, a great responsibility. Molly had served food at the local inn, good food, good customers. They talked about their house alongside the river and their gardens of flowers and vegetables. They never spoke about children; they had never had any children.

Daily they walked, she with a shuffle, he first with a walker, later in a wheelchair, along the main arteries of the building. Often they visited the nurses, aides, administrators and assistants. They joined the residents in the main lounge for conversation but did not participate in any of the organized activities.

When they were apart, Molly preferred the company of the other similarly senile inhabitants co-occupying her wing. Most would be gathered in their compact lounge, and its loud television, either staring into space or, more often, in deep carefree slumber. Conversations were usually with

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the staff or visitors, rarely amongst themselves. Nevertheless, unless Molly thought she was back in her riverside home, for her, this was home.

Marvin rarely conversed with his roommate; he would never have been heard over the fellow's deafening television. Worse, try as he would, in his enfeebled condition, leaving the room had become arduous. Confined to his room, his only solace was his plush, electrically heated reclining chair. He felt isolated and lonely and longing for Molly.

As the days advanced and Molly's memory faded and the severity of Marvin's rheumatoid arthritis increased, those walks and talks together became less enjoyable, more difficult and less frequent.

Alas, despite all the medication, the pain from Marvin's disease became so severally debilitating that he just stopped trying to move and in his isolation he just stopped trying to live and then he just stopped living. The roommate's television fell silent.

Molly had not noticed that their walks and talks had become less often. She does not remember much about the funeral.

Now, Molly's purse, a birthday gift from Marvin, is her constant companion. Most days she passes her time in the lounge staring into her personal void and unavoidably listening to the sounds of the television and the snores of her wing mates. Often she cannot remember the people around her and is astonished when those in the know will greet her by name. But when they inevitably ask "How is Molly?", she always replies "My husband is gone and I am all alone."

# Time Out

---

Horacio is nearing his demographic life expectancy. Because of that life, his list of accomplishments is long. Unfortunately, his list of what he still wants to accomplish is longer. He has less time than he knows what to do with. He wants a time out.

A distinguished professor at a prestigious university, Horacio is a man of many worthy deeds and with many letters after his name. He has counseled leaders of nations, industries and nongovernmental organizations. He is the recipient of numerous awards, medals and prizes.

His flourishing life began in an environment plagued with poverty and ignorance. Yet his brilliance out-shined most others and, with the aid of scholarships, he attended all the right schools. His origins drove his aspirations to make this world a better place. He wanted to enrich the world, not himself.

He has discussed with eminent physicists at his prominent university the conundrum as to why they can slow the speed of light from about 671 million miles per hour to zero, but the same cannot be done for time - it marches on. The scientists are without an adequate answer; instead, they tell him that time is an illusion.

He does not know how much time remains to complete the increasing number of items on his list. He only knows that his days are numbered and that, to his agitation, he does not know that number. This is not the proverbial bucket list of frivolous things he always wanted to do, such as driving a race car. His list consists of projects that could benefit the world.

Daily, Horacio takes the time to appreciate both his good health and good fortune to lead the exemplary life he has led. Despite his advancing years, he maintains the same quotidian routine. It starts at 5:30 AM, when he abruptly wakes to the gnawing realization that more time has been lost. After tending to his bodily needs, he turns on his computer and reviews his

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lengthy To Do list. Next comes a review of all his incoming email messages, replying when necessary.

Although he is long past retirement, the university had bestowed upon him distinguished emeritus professor status. Consequently, each weekday, punctually at 6:30 AM, he can be found swimming in the university pool and in his office by 8:00. Food can wait.

He again checks his To Do list and then the email. Given his standing at the university, he is afforded the opportunity to teach an advanced graduate course of his choosing, which commences punctually at 9:00. Afterwards, he is always assured of an ardent group of students following him back to his office.

After the last has left, if there are no speeches to give or meetings or conferences to attend, Horacio will close the door, disconnect the telephone, draw the blinds, turn on his radio and desk lamp and munch on a sandwich. Then it's back to working on his To Do list. He tries to truncate it but concludes that everything is important. He tries to prioritize it; alas, for the same reason, it cannot be done.

With each passing day, he becomes more disheartened. He begins to fear that so long as he is alive, he will always be adding to his list. He dare not tell his family, friends and colleagues about this fear - they will think him daft. Worse, they will patronize him.

The seemingly endless meetings, conferences, speeches and phone calls start to take a toll on the aging Horacio. His list only adds to his woes. It appears to grow longer before his eyes. With each passing night, he works more and sleeps less. Inevitably, he begins to experience cognitive and memory deficits. He is sloppy behind the wheel of his car. He fears he has senile dementia.

Then one night, in desperation, Horacio swallows some of his wife's sleeping pills - he reasons it can't hurt. He wakes after noon feeling refreshed and without any worries about the time lost. He slowly rises, shakes his head and debates whether to take the day off. He does not think it possible, but he feels both euphoric and peaceful. His list? Well, it can wait for another time. Life is good.

Horacio decides not to exercise and dons his favorite clothing. After a leisurely meal and some puttering, he enters the garage and, instead of

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getting into his usual car, he pulls the cover off his only indulgence. This car is painted Guards Red, has a 3.6 liter rear-mounted, air-cooled, engine, a six-speed manual transmission and can achieve 168 miles per hour. Too many speeding tickets have severely limited his number of journeys in the car. But today is special.

As the engine purrs and the exhaust growls, Horacio cautiously backs the car out of the garage and aims the wheel for the university. He stops at a red light and calmly puts on his left-turn signal indicator. It is a particularly long light and he uses the time to think about his list. The light changes to green and he executes a hasty right turn towards the coastal road. Time for a joyride.

With the sun and the ocean to his left, he throws all caution to the wind. This car is famous for hugging the road; let's see what it can do. What it does is attract the attention of a state trooper. Ignoring the siren, Horacio accelerates. More police cars take chase. How is he going to explain this to his insurance company? Who cares?

Horacio knows this road like the back of his hand. Driving faster puts the sight in his rear view mirror of the police cars flashing lights further into the distance and a smile on his face. Despite the roadside warning of an upcoming dangerous curve, he finds that incline, puts the pedal to the metal and, adhering to the laws of physics - not the road, he and his indulgence fly over the railing.

Regretting nothing, as Horacio plunges towards the deep blue sea, at the top of his voice he sings:

“That suicide is painless  
It brings on many changes  
And I can take or leave it if I please.”  
Horacio is out of time.

## After I Die

---

From the moment we are born, we are destined to die. This certainty provokes the subject of what is to become of my remains. My spouse wishes them to become part of an artificial reef, not natural. I prefer that my corpse be deposited in some remote location, or better yet composted, and let nature take its course. The subject matters.

Then one day, while pumping petrol, I realized that my quandary was of no matter. Regardless of the manner of my disposal, some of my remains may eventually fuel a car, home or factory - most certainly other organisms. As with all others before me, my carcass will be dispersed and become part of other living beings and elsewhere. Regard me as recyclable.

This is not some magical process. Microbes, maggots and larger carnivorous creatures of my necrobiome will methodically decompose my body from parts to tissues to cells to molecules to atoms. Some of me will become a bit of them and later a portion of their progeny and predators. Some of me will become part of their waste and disseminated to others, living or not.

I am more than my ancestors' genes. I am much more fundamental. I am the product of many atoms - some perhaps dating back to nearly the beginning of time and drifting into the future. I am a product of the cosmos. I am more than earth, ashes and dust. In the final reduction, I am some of the atoms that came before me and what is to come.

Like the reader, 99% of my body is composed of oxygen, phosphorus, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and carbon - enough of the latter to make 24 pencils.

Maybe my atoms are destined for greater things than becoming a mere writing utensil.

Also like the reader, my body contains some minuscule amounts of metals and metalloids like arsenic. Imagine my atoms' destinies. They

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could become part of a car and its fuel. They could transport someone. They could either save or kill someone. The possibilities are vast.

There are more than seven octillion (7,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000) atoms in my body. That seems like an astronomical number if you consider that there are only a mere 10 sextillion (10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000) stars in the universe. So my minuscule body has about a million times (1,000,000) more atoms than there are stars in the universe.

And, just as dying stars scatter their atoms becoming infinitesimal parts of other celestial bodies, after Earth meets its demise, my atoms will come to the same fate.

In life my genes are passed onto future earth-bound generations. In death my atoms have no such limits. They may never be ubiquitous but, just as they did before me, my atoms will exist - eternally.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Francis Reid is a nom de plume.

